



## TWOP | Doctor Who Recaps S5E1 – Joe Le Taxi

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We pick up where we left off, with Eleven in a pickle and hanging from a wildly careening TARDIS, screwdriver between his teeth, music louder than you can possibly imagine, and a lot of green-screen screaming. Almost hitting Big Ben! Finally getting onboard and sighing! Then another crash! More moaning! Weird credits and theme and logo and font! Lots of changes. Lots of shit happening at all times.

I will say upfront that I love Amy and I love Eleven, and I would watch them doing any amount of dumb shit because they are charming. Amy is fucked up and hot, and Eleven is hot and fucked up. And I have enjoyed these regeneration episodes, classically: Nine strolling into Rose's house and playing with his face, those fish on Christmas. And as an introduction for a Companion, this story is tops: What happens when the Doctor's regular amount of flaky is so messed with by the regeneration and a wonky TARDIS that he actually manages to ruin a person's mind?

The problem is that, going back to "Silence In The Library" -- and even "Girl In The Fireplace," which I loved -- these aren't stories so much as burstingly full collections of cool shit. Take a thousand ideas, chuck 'em in a hat, pull out ten or twenty at random, arrange them in no real order on a corkboard, and then apply a lot of genius grease and the Doctor making random connections for us in a pretense that any of this makes sense. The first *Doctor Who* I ever saw was "The Empty Child"/"Doctor Dances," and it's the only reason I took the assignment: Because it showed what this show was capable of doing. But honestly if you combine those two with "Fireplace," you've seen every trick we're going to get.

And every attempt to recreate that trick -- good feelings, rising music, unending talk about what humanity means and unending repetition of just how high the stakes are this time -- the paler and more desperate it seems. And in this way, my very strong affection for [Smith](#) & [Pond](#) becomes sort of a negative, because they're the ones that have to pretend this makes sense, and fashion some kind of emotional response to the piles and piles of nonsense they've been handed. It's sentimental kitsch, but it's sentimental kitsch on such a cynical level that it keeps telling you how sentimental and kitschy it is, while distracting you with more and yet more ideas from the Concept Hat.

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So keep that in mind, because I am going to try to stay focused on the story and not complain too much. If you liked the Library, you'll love this season. If you liked "Blink," no doubt you will love this season. But in the end, if you can't tell me what the story was about in three or four

sentences, then it's not really *about* anything at all, besides a few pat tacked-on philosophical ideas about the indomitable human spirit. Which is a bummer.

Positive: We meet Amelia in a strangely bleak old house surrounded by creepy kid stuff: A pinwheel whirling in the night, TARDIS song mixed with lullaby tinkles, a ramshackle old swingset. Her front door is blue as a police box, and all the windows are dark, and she's praying to Santa. (Excellent.)

"Dear Santa. Thank you for the dolls and pencils and the fish. It's Easter now, so I hope I didn't wake you, but honest, it is an emergency. There's a crack in my wall. Aunt Sharon says it's just an ordinary crack, but I know it's not, because at night, there's voices. So please, please, could you send someone to fix it? Or a policeman? Or..."

So there's a little adorable girl, very pragmatic, with a mysteriously invisible aunt who needs supernatural home repair. Definitely a fairytale, which makes me more comfortable. And then, right on time, the Doctor shows up. (This is the last time he'll show up on time.) She hears the VWORP and a great crash, hits pause on her prayer -- "Back in a moment" -- and checks out the wreck of the TARDIS in her garden. Thanking Santa, she heads outside in her nightie. It's effectively magical, with yellow light coming out, and then the doors of the TARDIS, on her side, fly open. A rappelling hook comes flying out, burying itself in the ground rather than her cute little head, and a very wet Doctor makes his way out to grin at her.

He asks for an apple, happy about having "cravings" in this incarnation, and climbing awkwardly out. "Just had a fall. All the way down there, right to the library. Hell of a climb back up." They talk about how the swimming pool is in the library, way down there, and she seems to accept this after a few unimpressed looks at his manic self. The dimensional joke -- that with the TARDIS on her side, the direction of "in" goes infinitely back, which is down -- is fun, and one of the brainteaser things I really liked about "Blink." Changing frames of physical reference are a Moffat trademark, and something that takes full advantage of the capability of this show.

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They discuss the crack in the wall, he doesn't admit to anything including being a policeman, and the whole time Amelia's trying to get to the point -- this crack in her wall -- he's spazzing out, post-regeneration: "Still cooking," as he says it. In terms of demonstrating how charming this Doctor is, you couldn't do better than staging him as the backyard *E.T.* to the cutest little girl that ever lives. On the other hand, it's half the episode.

"Does it scare you?" he asks, she thinks, about the regeneration issues -- that gold stuff coming out of his mouth, the sudden hungers and cramps all over -- but he's taken the measure of her enough to know she's pretty unshakable: He means the crack in the wall. Absolutely, she agrees, and she's so serious that it means something to him, which means it means more to us: This little girl doesn't screw around. If she says the crack is an issue, then we'll deal with it. He hops up from his knees and grins with relief: "I'm the Doctor. Do everything I tell you, don't ask stupid questions and don't wander off." Then he walks into a tree.

"If you're a doctor, why does your box say POLICE?" HE is too busy being adorable. He takes a bite out of the apple, spits it at her face, and says that no, he hates apples. How about yogurt? Spits in her face -- "I hate yogurt, it's just stuff with bits in!" -- and explains that he has a new mouth, with new rules. "It's like eating after cleaning your teeth, everything tastes wrong." The music reminds us that this is all very droll and sweet, and he goes, "You're Scottish, fry something." Bacon, he hates, Beans are "evil." Bread and butter gets tossed in the yard, complete with a meowing cat. We're still not done, and the music is getting wilder all the time,

and we hate carrots, and it turns out that what the Doctor needs is fish fingers and custard. Wacky!

They sit in the kitchen while he dips his fishsticks and discuss each other. She tells him he's funny -- but in the way a forty-year-old police sergeant might -- and that tickles him. He likes her name, Amelia Pond, because it's like a fairytale. She's Scottish, but moved with her aunt to "rubbish" England for some reason. The Doctor commiserates with her parentless status, pointing out that he doesn't even have an aunt: They agree, childlike, that he's lucky. The Doctor doesn't mention that his family is *bullshit* and molested his best friend through space and time in order to end the entire universe, because that's not a conversation you can have with a little kid. Not even an absurdly special kid like Amelia could handle the total bummer that is the Time Lords.

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So, the aunt. Where is she? "Out." Not a problem, apparently. The Doctor -- in case we didn't notice -- is amazed by her unflappability: "Box falls out of the sky, man falls out of box, man eats fish custard, and look at you, just sitting there. So you know what I think? Must be a hell of a scary crack in your wall."

I like that he's making friends with Amelia at this age -- even though the consequences are disastrous -- because that makes their whole relationship different. It's not precisely like the Reinette/Slow Path Thing, because she had this full life and because she really was in love with him: It's an Imaginary Friend Thing, which is much cooler and makes the eventual weirdness and anger of Amy a lot more fun. I guess I can see the parallels, but when you're dealing with a show *entirely about* a time-traveler and his relationships to mortals, it seems like this would happen a lot more.

They tromp upstairs, and he quotes himself: "You've had some cowboys in here..." Quickly explains that he doesn't mean actual cowboys, "though that can happen," and Amelia produces a smiling apple from her pocket, handing it over: "I used to hate apples, so my mum put faces on them." He agrees that Amelia's mum sounds awesome, and it is a very Doctor thing to do, and he pops it in his own pocket. It would have made sense to do this in the original conversation about apples, but whatever. So he explains that the crack is a Crack, like, it's a crack in *everything* and even if you knocked down the wall it would still be there. Which is what I was hoping it was, so that's cool. Also cool: Foreshadowing.

"Everywhere, in everything. It's a split in the skin of the world. Two parts of space and time that should never have touched, pressed together."

I do think that last sentence will bite us in the ass, around twelve episodes from now. Just as the Doctor intuits that there are probably voices coming out of that crack sometimes -- and empties a glass of water with one of the cutest gestures I've ever seen a grown man pull, to listen -- a voice comes out of the crack: "Prisoner Zero has escaped!" Amelia's heard about this before, from the crack; the Doctor explains helpfully that there's a prison on the other side of the crack, and somebody's gotten out. "Do you know what that means? You need a better wall." Word. But then he goes all Doctor and says that the only way to close the breach is to "open it all the way." Very Doctor: "The forces will invert, and it'll snap itself shut." Or another thing, which he doesn't say, but is a very bad thing:

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"You know when grown-ups tell you everything's going to be fine and you think they're probably lying to make you feel better? 'Everything's going to be fine.'" So he clears the wall and Amelia gapes at him, and he's so excited about whatever happens next that he's breathing super hard. He is excellent when getting into trouble. So he sonics the crack and it opens wide, and tries to talk to the voice, but a giant eyeball appears and stares at them through the crack, and then shoots a laser at the Doctor's nuts.

The crack closes, and the psychic paper explains, once again, that Prisoner Zero has escaped. Meaning that Zero is in the house. So the Doctor runs around the house for awhile with ADD, and then -- this part is filmed in such a way that it makes no sense at this time -- realizes that there's an extra door in the house that leads to an extra room in the house, that you can't see except for the corner of your eye. (So now we've got three things that could/should just be their own episode. There will be many, many more.) Before the Doctor can explain the explanation above, the Cloister Bell starts ringing, and he screams and runs outside to check on the TARDIS.

She's not doing so well. Science things are happening to her, as a result of the sudden explosions at the end of the New Years episode, and she's recreating herself inside to accommodate the budget cuts, and so he's got to get in there and stabilize her with a "five-minute hop into the future." Sort of, I guess, like driving about once you've gotten a jump from a helpful stranger. Amelia's stuck on how it's a time machine, which is awesome, but she immediately hands us the next part of the episode: He says he's only going to be gone five minutes, but this is patently -- and, in her case -- empirically untrue. People leave, and they don't come back. He swears he'll be back immediately -- "I'm not people, do I even look like people?" -- but Amelia knows people better than this newborn: They come into your life for a moment, give you a little kiss, and then go away again.

With a (very annoying) "Geronimo!" and a splash, he's gone. She dimples up real good and watches the TARDIS vanish, then runs through her abandoned fairytale-looking garden, upstairs to her bedroom, past the hidden door which is now hanging open, grabs a tiny sad suitcase and pops it on the bed -- this would be where I started crying and probably fell in love with Amy Pond forever, because you know what's next -- and out in her cutest hat and winter coat, to sit on her suitcase near the demolished shed and wait for his return. And in the house, Zero makes itself at home.

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Tick tock, and the Doctor comes out of the smoking TARDIS, screaming for his little friend, sonicking the back door in a panic, screaming that Zero's in the house, trying desperately to sonic the hidden room before getting unceremoniously konked on the head with an oar, or a cricket bat, or something even more British.

Over in the Leadworth hospital, cutish but very British Nurse Rory is trying to explain to a doctor that all the coma patients have started calling for her -- meaning, of course, the Doctor. (Why?) She's not having it, but then one of them, a stocky bloke, followed by all of them (including awesome Olivia Colman from *Peep Show*), and then there's a bunch of staring at the coma patients.

Fade over on the last echoing moan to the Doctor, who's woozy in the Pond house. His eyes roll around and he is adorable. The camera goes up, up the sexy legs of a Scottish redhead dressed in a pervert's idea of a police costume, calling for backup on a white male, mid-20s, who has broken and entered. He whines about the cricket bat upside the head, and there's a cute moment where he admits that a cricket bat konk was exactly the thing to finish off his regeneration and get him back to rights. I like that. He stares at her and they talk about how

she's police, and has backup coming. She's sharp and funny and a little bit mean -- until he asks about Amelia.

"Little Scottish girl, where is she? I promised her five minutes but the engines were phasing. I suppose I must have gone a bit far. Has something happened to her?" The woman stares at him, intrigued and already getting angry, and explains that Amelia Pond hasn't lived here in a long time: Six months. He's nearly got tears in his eyes, shouting about her: "No, no, no! I can't be six months late! I said five minutes. I promised! What happened to her?" The woman turns away so he can't see her face, and radios her sergeant again. "What happened to Amelia Pond?" What happened to Amelia Pond indeed.

The stocky unshaven bloke in the coma ward has pictures of his beloved black dog everywhere near his bedside, to keep him company. Rory can't seem to get a break from the doctor lady, whom even though she just heard them all yowling doesn't really think that Rory's obviously correct suspicions that something iffy is going on should be respected. Which I mean, this is a weird thing and I suppose she's within her fictional rights to blow it off altogether rather than running off into an adventure with this twitchy nurse -- he's got Frodo eyes -- so she tells him to go home and sleep off the crazy. "Why are you giving me your phone?" she interrupts herself, because he wants to give her proof that the talking coma people have also been wandering the village. Before he can show her the pics, her beeper goes off and she sends him home for the day. The shorthand for the bureaucratic frustration we're meant to be singing is him stuttering a lot of *but-but-but*, but it's effective enough.

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The redhead continues to observe the Doctor -- who is chained to a radiator just opposite the mysterious hidden door concept to which we still haven't been properly introduced -- in her miniskirt and tiny bowler hat. (I must admit I was confused, although not as much as some.) She tells him that he's speaking to the person who lives in the house, that she's both the tenant and the police, and he asks her then how many rooms there are. Why? "Because it will change your life." He says things like this constantly, with only hotness and dramatic skill making it anything less than embarrassing.

She counts the rooms -- five -- and he directs her to the sixth, just behind her: "Exactly where you don't want to look. Where you never want to look." (Jacob crack, as we all know by now, but without the follow-through of it being anything but a narrative bridge to symbolic nowhere.) She finally glimpses it, out of the corner of her eye, and he explains the sixth door carries a "perception filter" (was it the Preachers that used those?) that makes the eye slide away. The woman is grossed out! "But that's a whole room! That's a whole room I've never even noticed!" Right, because of the filter. Zero's got himself a room to rent.

The Doctor demands that the woman uncuff him, and she admits she's lost the key. He's confused, because he still thinks that she's a policewoman, and then terrified as she makes her way toward the secret door without even pausing to worry about it. He screams and screams at her, and she totally ignores him, to the point where he's as scared as he is annoyed, and he realizes that the screwdriver's probably close to the door, where she knocked him out. It's not there, just like there's nothing there, and he reminds her that if she couldn't see the door, why would she be able to see the terrible thing, and begs her to get out of the mysterious room immediately.

She finds the screwdriver on a dusty table -- Zero is not a good housekeeper at all -- and the Doctor continues to scream at her from the hallway, struggling against the radiator like a little kid at bedtime, as she gets more and more intrigued and less and less worried.

Of course, there's the thing right behind her: A silly sort of snake thing reared up behind her with a million teeth. Like the Weeping Angels, or their opposite, she's safe as long as she doesn't look at it. But because she's Amy Pond, knowing thus just makes her look at it. It's awful, she screams, it tries to strike, and she comes running back out into the hallway. She hands the screwdriver over to the Doctor while Zero hangs out in the secret door for no real reason, and he sonics himself out. The doorway starts glowing while he rubs his screwdriver, and then she admits that she's not got backup coming, because she's not a real policewoman: She's a kissogram.

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Which is when -- as she whipped off that bowler hat and swished her hair around like a shampoo ad -- the internet exploded. Now, the camera has been devouring her since we got here, and there's confusion as to how exploitative (or, in hysterical-speak, how close to being a stripper) this job is, and the Doctor is certainly unimpressed, but there are a few things that make this not an issue for me. One, feminism has been ruined by the internet and no longer means much more than a competitive listing of grievances from the comfort of our armchairs. Two, we are talking about a country that for a hundred years has been watching *Benny Hill* and giggling about boobies on Page Three. Just today I saw a picture of the Companion Jo Whoever totally naked wrapped around a Dalek, and it was disgusting, and the most interesting thing about British sexuality is still the obsession with little boys being spanked. I write the whole island off generally, because they're better at feminism and somehow worse at sexual maturity than we are, which makes transatlantic understanding this stuff really hard sometimes. But most of all: This is the absolute best clue we have to what Amy is.

Amy does for her job what the Doctor did to her. She shows up, she promises the world -- and more importantly intimacy -- and then disappears forever. It's like Donna being a temp, but incredibly personal. The Doctor failed her, and she had nobody else. She's a hard shell around a groovy angry center, and as any of the ecdysiasts of my acquaintance can tell you, the best revenge is being hot and then leaving at the end of your shift. It's power, and a damn sight more valuable feminism than complaining about Uma's Photoshopped thighs. The only people who pay in that scenario are the men, and complaining about sex work in this way is an incredibly sheltered attempt at making grown women's choices for them, which is gross.

And even if she were a stripper, that would still be awesome, because the show has to accomplish a lot in making her character work, and telling us straight up that she prefers to be vacant from her life -- from Rory, from the thing at the end of this episode -- while simultaneously taking a ferocious bite out of it, because of who she is, is accomplished quite easily here. If your knee stops jerking for a second, you'll see how: Amy professes, and fails, at the same relationship -- with Earth, and humanity -- that the Doctor professes and fails to have with same.

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The secret door pops open, and a stocky unshaven bloke with a big black dog comes out. The dog is growling, Amy thinks at first, but soon realizes they're both growling and barking: One creature, taking the form of two creatures. (Brilliant. I love this bit. Could have been its own episode, but no.) "Clever old Multiform," the Doctor chuckles, and makes fun of him screwing up the voice. "Where did you get the pattern from? You'd need a psychic link, a live feed. How did you fix that?" Coma patients, clearly.

The snarls echo all over the place, and the Doctor tells him to "stay," and there's a bunch of back and forth about how they have backup coming, but they don't really -- "That was a clever



lie to save our lives," he hisses -- so then he changes tack and says there's no backup, which is now why they're safe, because they're not a threat. Whenever anything happens, Amy goes, "What?" It's sort of funny, but this episode is catchphrase central so it's also sort of obnoxious and coked-up first-drafty. This goes on a while, and then the voice from the crack echoes through the sky: "Attention, Prisoner Zero. The human residence is surrounded..." Backup. The Doctor explains that they do have backup after all, and that's why they're safe. "Prisoner Zero will vacate the human residence or the human residence will be incinerated."

They run! Bad guy stares out of the window over the back door with a seriously angry face, and they hang out outside. His clothes are all kinds of messed up, since for him this episode has been even shorter than it was for us so far. In addition to the screwed up screwdriver, the TARDIS is also screwed up, so no help there. While running around and yelling -- and the voice of the prison guard echoing, and the bloke growling -- they discuss how her options, post-cricket batting, were to dress up like policewoman or a French maid, and they review the whole plot to this point just in case you were bored to death.

The Doctor sees the rebuilt shed, and gets confused: Where did it come from, and why is it ten -- he sniffs, it's actually twelve -- years old? Because he's twelve years late. He asks over and over again why she said it had only been six months, and finally she screams in his face, "*Why did you say five minutes?*" It's very sad, and she's very angry, and that's the first time that you realize she is impressively fucked up.

Him too. "What?" he asks, again and again, as she pulls him all through the village Leadworth, away from the house. She's angry, she hit him with a cricket bat, she lost twelve years to him, she went through four psychiatrists, biting each and every one. And why, besides her total awesomeness, did she do this? "They said you weren't real."

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The warning is coming now out of everything -- ice cream truck speaker, people's radios -- and the Doctor and Amy run around at length before busting in on some old lady's house. She's going through every channel on her TV, but every channel is just that eyeball talking about Prisoner Zero. The Doctor spins some bizarre lie that isn't important, and the woman remarks on how Amy keeps changing jobs -- sexy nurse, sexy policewoman, sexy nun -- and the Doctor starts to figure out what kissogramming entails, and what's happened: "Who's Amy? You were Amelia." The name he loved. "Bit fairy tale," she snarks, and he gets sad.

The old woman recognizes him, somehow, which embarrasses Amy for reasons we don't know yet, and the Doctor asks her exactly WTF a kissogram is. "I go to parties and I kiss people. With outfits. It's a laugh." He's horrified in a particularly hilarious way -- "You were a little girl five minutes ago!" -- and she tells him he's worse than Aunt Sharon. He's got, this Smith kid, he's got a really nice, sparkly young-old thing going on. He can go from four to forty with one wiggle of his rubber face: "I'm the Doctor, I'm worse than everybody's aunt," he shouts, appalled, and rethinks: "And that is... *Not* how I'm introducing myself."

On the radio, they're talking about Zero in French and German, meaning they're sending the message to the whole world -- which the Doctor realizes is "the human residence" in question, and that we're all going to die in about twenty minutes. Of course, it's hard to listen to the annoying amount of nothing that he's saying to explain all of this, because a tall sexy drink of water just walked in carrying a laptop -- Jeff, the grandson of the old lady whose house we've decided to hang out in -- and Eleven is *all over that shit*. Jeff is shocked, but not so much by the hot/alien invasion of his personal space: He recognizes the Doctor too, by name. Which is impossible.

"Are you the Doctor? He is, isn't he? He's the Doctor! The Raggedy Doctor. All those cartoons you did, when you were little. The Raggedy Doctor, it's him!" Amy gets more and more embarrassed, finally screaming at Jeff to shut up, but the old lady finally gets it too: The Raggedy Doctor. Who is explaining that the planet is about to be destroyed, by a million giant eyeball Christmas stars far above the clouds, if Prisoner Zero doesn't vacate "the human residence."

He leads Amy through the city, tottering on her pins, trying to come up with a solution. "What is this place? Where am I?" Leadworth, a half-hour's drive out of Gloucester, too tiny for an airport or even "a little" nuclear power station. All he's got is a post office, which is closed right now, and not even a car. There's a duckpond, which catches his eye just like Amelia Pond did twelve years ago. "Why aren't there any ducks?" There never have been. And so then what makes it a duckpond? She asks why any of this matters, and he reminds her that he's still not done cooking and he's not ready to save the world this time. You feel for him. I thought this season was going to be about the Time Lords, like, cute boy Doctor and cute girl Companion v. mean old men, but there's a whiff of that here, this cute boy Doctor on his first time out wishing he had more time and more toys to use. His very real panic, as his body continues to thwart him.

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The sun goes away, because they've sealed off the atmosphere, and now they're going to roast the planet inside. The Doctor takes a moment to bitch about cell phones -- people taking pictures of an anomaly in the sky that they don't understand is apparently offensive -- and the whole time Amy just refuses to believe that any of this is happening. He reminds her that she believed about the time machine, once, and she says she grew up, and he spins some gaylord Robin Williams bullshit about how you should never grow up, or whatever bullshit old men are always cramming down your throat about believing in the stars and dreams coming true. I mean, Amy is fucked up, but not because she "grew up" and therefore needs to un-grow up: She needs to believe that dreams can come true *only insofar* as her own vast ability to make them come true, not her ability to just sit there dreaming and managing to somehow become *more innocent*. So dumb.

Because it's been a million years and the Doctor has yet to finish a single sentence or do more than dangle the tantalizing beginnings of sentences in front of us, he does that some more but with slapping himself in the head. Then there's some special effect where he mentally remembers everything that was just happening on the village green. It takes a while, not what you would call an instant, and realizes one of the things was Nurse Rory, taking video of the stocky unshaven bloke. This gets it done in his head, not that he's going to tell us shit about it, and when he summons her to action -- "Twenty minutes, the planet burns. Run to your loved ones and say goodbye, or stay and help me!" -- you can't blame her for telling him to go fuck himself. Maybe if you actually said one thing that made sense and wasn't just a bunch of scriptwriter tomfoolery, she'd trust you.

Instead, she yanks the Doctor over to a car -- surprising the old man who just got out of it -- and slams the Doctor's tie in the door, to keep him still. So he'll answer her questions, instead of just being annoying. But then you've got the Doctor pointing at the very real blackout overhead, and the evidence of the space snake that is also a dog-and-man, so really the show just made him act annoying so she would do this, which sort of makes her annoying too. She tells the old man to stop whining at her and go get some coffee, and they discuss once again everything that has happened so far in the episode.

He tosses her the carved-face apple, which is still fresh, and gives her some Tinkerbell clap speech about "Just twenty minutes, just believe me for twenty minutes," which is essentially as



repetitive and reaching-for-meaning as "Don't blink" or the entirety of obnoxious "Midnight" or any of the other times this shit has been so fake instead of being real. They stare at each other and he says it sixteen more times, and the TARDIS starts singing, and there's a Magical Moment™ In which things go slow-motion -- there's even a psychotically intense lens flare -- so you know that something is unlocking in Amy on a personal level and she'll never be the same and her illusions about being a grown-ass woman are unfounded and based on daddy issues, courtesy the Doctor, that have turned her into a stripper, and it's all beautiful and shit.

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So yes, she believes, she's ungrowing, she holds up the keyfob and unlocks the car door, and they run over and grab Rory. Who is her boyfriend. And who has been standing a few yards away the whole time she's been dressed like porn and throwing this hot young Doctor man around the place, but they just didn't notice each other. Now it's Rory's turn to not answer simple goddamn questions, like what's special about the man-and-dog, because he's got to stutter about the Raggedy Doctor for a bit and finally explain that man-and-dog is also in a coma in the hospital... And the Doctor finishes his sentences, because this is the next clue.

Rory gets a good line -- "What? There's a Prisoner Zero too?" -- before all kinds of barking and spaceships interrupt the Doctor's faceoff with Zero, and the Doctor realizes that not even being the man-and-dog will hide Zero if he causes a massive electrical/technological disturbance, so he sonics this whole area of town and things go wild: Lampposts exploding, sirens going off, a lady on a Jazzy that goes mad (hilarious, and also seemingly stressful for old Rory to watch) and rushes out into traffic, and so on.

The eyeball ship appears to scan the area, and the Doctor blows up a phone booth, but this somehow destroys his screwdriver, and the eyeball loses interest. The Doctor whines about this, and the man-and-dog vanish and slip down a helpful drain grate. So now we've got no TARDIS, no screwdriver, and seventeen minutes. And they don't even know how crummy it is, because also Zero is now at the hospital being all kinds of menacing.

Amy and the Doctor make a nonverbal agreement to actually use complete sentences, since they have seventeen minutes to chat and fuck about, and he confirms for her that yes, the dog-and-man has been hiding in her house for twelve years, which is a blip to a Multiform like Zero, and that it was the Doctor who led the eyeball ships to Earth *today*, rather than them showing up when it first escaped, the answer to a question nobody cares about, because of that time the eyeball saw him through the crack. "They're only late because I am," he says, and then goes back to be annoyingly uncommunicative, snatching Rory's phone and doing stuff to it while they talk about the Doctor and how Amy used to make Rory dress up like him (when they were kids, don't be gross) and how these are all coma patients, which we knew. Eight comas, eight disguises for Prisoner Zero -- including a dog this time, because there's a dog in the guy's coma dream. Clearly, what this means is that the Doctor needs a laptop.

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Which is fine? Except the only reason he's acting like this is for the emotionally manipulative, dorky moment when we get the punchline to why he demanded the phone, or why he needs a laptop, or who he is, or why we only have twenty minutes, and the whole episode is like that: People acting woefully annoying in order to set up jokes and cynical "WOW!" moments later, and it's obnoxious, because if you could tell a story properly you wouldn't be constantly having to hit us over the head with how amazing and magical every fucking thing is: They would just *be amazing*. All on their own.

"Your friend, what was his name? Not him, the good-looking one." Rory's offended, and even more offended when he realizes they're talking about Jeff, and the Doctor only remembers him and his hotness because he needs a laptop for whatever reason, so he sends still-confused Rory and up-for-anything Amy off to evacuate the hospital so he can go hit on Jeff some more.

Jeff's busy masturbating when the Doctor gets to Gran's house, so there's a bit of urban fervor before the Doctor can seize his computer and babble some more. "The sun's gone wibbly, so right now, somewhere, there's going to be a big video conference call. All the experts in the world panicking at once, and do you know what they need? Me. Ah, and here they all are. All the big boys. NASA, Jodrell Bank, Tokyo Space Centre, Patrick Moore..." He offers to introduce Gran to this last, who is apparently "a devil" with the ladies, and then decides to annoy the global security community at large.

"I know, you should switch me off. But before you do, watch this! Fermat's Theorem. The proof, and I mean the real one, never seen before. Poor old Fermat, got killed in a duel before he could write it down. My fault, I slept in. Oh, and here's an oldie but a goodie: Why electrons have mass! And a personal favorite of mine, faster-than-light travel, with two diagrams and a *joke*! Look at your screens: Whoever I am, I'm a genius."

If you're the sort of person who enjoys it when fictional people tell you how freakin' awesome they are, then you are going to love this season of *Doctor Who*. (Or should I say, "Basically... It rocks!") But if you find that sort of thing flesh-crawlingly dorky, then I would suggest you avert your eyes if, at any point, the Doctor starts talking. And I'm not being unsympathetic, because I completely understand why geeks find this construction funny ("*a, b, c...n*, so basically *x*," where *a* through *n*, inclusive, are bullet points in a list and *x* is an unexpected summation, either comically understated or grammatically surprising, or sarcastic in some way), because it's how their brains work. It's why *Monty Python* and puns are funny: The subversion of expected outcomes into absurdity. But for the rest of us it's a horribly embarrassing rhetorical theme, and worst of all it's a tic: The Doctor's already done it twice in this episode and I left it out because I don't approve.

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So now we follow up with why he needed the phone, which is because he's writing a computer virus, about which *a, b, c ... n* also equals *x*, and sending it from the phone for reasons he's not telling us to all of the geniuses onscreen. It's a "reset command" which "gets in the wi-fi" and "resets every counter it can find." Basically, the entire world will begin transmitting ZERO at the same time, making -- another favorite Moffat theme -- the Prisoner and the message the same thing. Then he hands the worlds' leaders over to Jeff, and we get *another* speech that means nothing but rising music and believe-in-yourself treacle, delivered to someone we couldn't care less about.

"In ten minutes, you're going to be a legend. In ten minutes, everyone is going to be offering you any job you want. But first, you have to be magnificent. You have to make them trust you and get them working. This is it, Jeff. Right here, right now. This is when you fly. Today's the day you save the world."

Barf. Just believe him for twenty minutes, Random Dude. *Just twenty minutes.*

Running, running, still very tattered and raggedy... These new credits -- they show both Time Vortices on the ad bumpers here on BBBCA -- it's funny, and interesting, because the old credits, it was redshift/blueshift according to direction of travel (and golden that time that Rose did that thing). This is like ice, and fire.

Rory and Amy are fussing about outside the hospital blockade and trying to get the Doctor on the phone. There's a neat moment where we don't hear her conversation, and she goes, "Oh," and Rory asks what he said, and he said "Look in the mirror," because of course she's dressed like a stripper policewoman. And while that's a bit dodgy, her laugh when she figures it out is just wonderful. Ha-haa, she says. It's great. She puts her hair back up, and we see the Doctor has stolen a firetruck.

Out into the abandoned hallway comes the *Peep Show* lady, twins by the hand, and their heads twitching in the same directions, and the voices coming out of all three of them by turns, and Zero figures out he's doing the voices wrong: "So many mouths," she says, and that's scary enough, but then her teeth! Lots of choppy cuts back and forth as the thing chases them through the hospital while the Doctor, still on the phone, tries to get there on time.

"Oh, dear. Little Amelia Pond. I've watched you grow up. Twelve years, and you never even knew I was there." (Ack! Eugh!) "Little Amelia Pond, waiting for her magic Doctor to return. But not this time, Amelia." Of course, the Doctor comes flying through the window that Amy directed him to, and they face off. Zero knows what he is, and explains that if she drops the disguise the Atraxi will find and kill him: "If I am to die: Let there be fire." What a gorgeous line. The Doctor points out that Zero opened the crack, but apparently he's wrong. And again, there's the sense that every second of this episode is important, not because we're so clever but because the show needs us to see how clever it is:

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"The cracks in the skin of the universe - don't you know where they came from? You don't, do you? The Doctor in the TARDIS doesn't know... The universe is cracked. The Pandora will open. Silence will fall."

It's good to know there are more cracks than just this one, because that means the issue is parallel-related, like the Void, and that means timestreams and timebubbles and all sorts of fun things. The Pandora, that sounds interesting, like Pandora's Box but crossed with a calliope. Silence is probably a proper noun, if my instincts are right. Of course, she could have said "Medusa Cascade" and "Whatever Schism" and "Shadow Proclamation" and we could be in any other season at all. Having had it both ways I must say that I do hate being unspoiled with this show, because in writing about it, it's easier to plaster over the horrible bits and focus on the point when you know what the point is.

Maybe there's more, but right then one of the fifty brilliant plans starts happening, and all of Jeff's team are sending the ZERO message everywhere, and the Atraxi are suddenly alerted. Zero points out that they still can't actually find her, and then something neat: The phone he's using, Rory's phone, contains pictures of all his comatose bodies. I didn't see that one coming. The Doctor congratulates himself -- "Who da man?" -- and immediately thinks better of it. This one time.

They discuss how Zero's out of options, but then suddenly she doesn't need coma people, she can just put Amy into a coma, because they were housemates for so long. So she does that. More creepiness, though: She takes the form of the *Doctor*, which confuses him until little Amelia steps out from behind him, grinning horribly. She's dreaming of the Doctor, in her coma, just like she's been dreaming her whole life. That's how bad he hurt her. The girl who was pragmatic enough, but still vulnerable enough, to pray to Santa: He's the Crack.

The Doctor says no, and because he's always right I guess he's right, but he thinks that she's dreaming of him because she can hear him talking in the room. (Which, how come that didn't

happen with everybody else?) So he starts yelling at Amy to remember the house that time, the secret door, and what she saw when she went in. More flashy-flash memory stuff, and Zero takes the form of Zero. The snake with the teeth. That's pretty brilliant, as well. There's so much going on it's hard to fit in context, but looking back there are lots of neat moments here. So the Atraxi teleport Zero out of the hospital, and she hisses one more time: "Silence, Doctor. Silence will fall."

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Yeah, definitely a person, or a place. "Fall" as in battle, not as in silence. So the atmosphere is okay, and the Atraxi take off, but then the Doctor calls them back -- apologizing to Rory about his cell bill -- and yells at them. "I didn't say you could go! Article 57 of the Shadow Proclamation. This is a fully established, level 5 planet, and you were going to burn it? What, did you think no one was watching? You lot, back here. Now!"

Rory's appalled -- "Did he just save the world from aliens and then bring all the aliens back again?" -- but the Doctor, who is at least a little nervous about this for a second, realizes he needs to dress for their arrival. Amy watches him dress, grinning adorably, even when Rory tells her to turn her back. Can't blame you.

They run out on the roof and a giant eyeball scans him while he gets dressed in his Official Eleven Outfit -- he chats it up about which tie goes with this outfit, the usual -- and runs down the rules: Earth is not a threat, Earth is not guilty. But is this world protected? It thinks and thinks: From the Rachnoss and the Dalek Vault all the way to the rubber monsters of the Sixties... And then all Ten Doctors, in rapid succession, as the Atraxi get more and more terrified, and he asks again: What happened to all those bad guys?

"Hello, I'm the Doctor," he says, looking at the camera. "Basically..."  $a, b, c \dots n = x$ .

Much laughing and hugging and whatever, and then back to the Pond house to reacquaint himself with the TARDIS, who has recreated herself. He grins at her, from the door -- we don't see anything but light -- and shakes his head. "Oh, you sexy thing. Look at you!" They take off, and Amy stares after him, and closes her eyes. Burnt for believing, once again.

Cut to Amelia, out in the sunlight the morning after, hearing the TARDIS and smiling up into the sky... Amy wakes up. It's night. She stares out the window, too afraid to smile, too afraid to break the spell. When she moves, she moves fast, like an animal: Down the stairs, out into the garden in her nightie and slippers, and there he is. Just a few minutes later, in his complete outfit -- brown jacket, bowtie -- grinning like nothing, tapping her door proudly.

She makes fun of his bowtie and he waggles his eyebrows: "Yeah, it's cool. Bowties are cool." She cocks her head at him: "Are you from another planet?" Yes. And speaking of, does she want to go see them? All of them?

"All that stuff, the hospital, the spaceships, Prisoner Zero..."

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He nods proudly. "Oh, don't worry. That's just the beginning. There's loads more!"

Not the point. All those amazing things were two years ago, she screams at him, and he jumps out of her swinging radius. So that's fourteen years, she shouts as he realizes: "Fourteen years

since fish custard. Amy Pond, the girl who waited, you've waited long enough." She remembers, now that it's real. The swimming pool, the library, the swimming pool *in* the library. Although it's moved now, probably. She tells him she's not coming, and he reminds her that she wanted to, fourteen years ago.

"I grew up."

He promises to "fix that," still gross, and continues to tempt her -- she won't have to stay in her nightie since the TARDIS has clothes; the swimming pool possibly -- pretending she won't say no, and lets her in. She nearly cries at the new place, seeing it with us for the first time: Glass floors, banisters to places and platforms, glass pumps and typewriters on the console.

"You are so sure that I'm coming." And why? Because he's just like her: The Scottish girl in the English village. And the reason he knows that matters is that she kept her accent. The things she held onto; the real her, under the cracks. He's one of them, and more importantly he *has* to be, because otherwise he broke her, and that's unacceptable. He has to reverse the damage. The cracks.

"Can you get me back for tomorrow morning?" Going by his track record? She won't tell him why, but it's been two years. She stares up at the ceiling, already convinced as he spins the wheels and pulls the levers, and asks why her (again), because people always have a reason. "Do I look like people?" He didn't, fourteen years ago. He looked like somebody she could trust. Now, does he look like "people"?

Yes.

He promises he only wants her because he's lonely, talking to himself all the time, but I think it's a lie. There's something strange about her, there always was. He chose her the second she gave him that apple with the face on, maybe earlier than that. When she asked if she could come with him, fourteen years ago, he said "Of course." A steampunky screen shows a sine wave oscillation, and across it spreads the Crack. You can barely hear him promise, it's thrumming so loudly. He shuts it off, taps it decisively, and goes lighthearted again. It's a tiny moment, but a scary one: There's something about Amy Pond, and he knows it, and we don't.

He asks if the TARDIS is freaking her out, like they sometimes get, and she says she's just happy he's not "a madman with a box" after all. True. He giggles and assures her that is exactly what he is. Also true. If you plan on going on an epic quest, there are some things to look out for. Like a guy with magic powers who appears out of nowhere, and seems to be a nutter. They take off into space, and time.

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Up in Amy's bedroom is her childhood: Plasticine TARDIS, the Raggedy Doctor in blue, Amelia in her nightie; crayon TARDIS; puppets made of paper cups and clothespins. Little dollies of them both, hair grown wild. There is a suitcase full of pictures and poppets, full of dreams. While she lay in bed dreaming of Amelia, and her little red coat, smiling up into the sun, waiting for her Doctor, there in the closet was her wedding dress, waiting for tomorrow morning.

She grew up, like we all do. Broken or not, like we all are: She grew up. But he'll soon fix that.

*Discuss this episode in our [forums](#), then read our exclusive interviews with [Matt Smith](#) and [Karen Gillan](#).*

## TWOP | Doctor Who Recaps S5E2 – Starwhales Should Be Afraid of Their People

<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/the-beast-below-1/>

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Man, you call one shitty episode out and the whole world freaking ends. I haven't gotten this many death threats and questions about my parentage since that ass-terrible [BSG](#) finale! It's a funny old thing, the *Who* thing. I forgot that while I've been over *here*, spending five hardcore years building a relationship with a franchise I still don't know much about, you've been over *there*, reading the recaps or not reading them. The break for S3 and S4 certainly didn't help, and nobody seems to understand that the show was officially re-added last year for those Specials, but in any case the bottom line is that, for a lot of *Who* people, this site "just started recapping this show." Makes sense, right? And what a nice surprise for them... Until they actually started reading.

And I left those people out, I think, which is a problem but not really *my* problem? Certainly seems to be a problem for a certain scary, vocal population: What is for me a bump in one unbroken road of chances and second chances and loving the show for what it is and feeling like an honorary member of LINDA (Bless Bliss! Glory is the new Grace!) seems to a certain group of tragic people like an unprovoked attack on their entire lives. I get it. Takes an ass to fill every seat, and I am not here to shit on something you (and, unbeknownst to these people, I) love. The last thing I would want to do is piss off anybody, especially anyone already so angry and dissatisfied with their own lives that they could possibly behave in such a classless, ugly way. They don't need me adding to their burdens by criticizing their favorite thing. So it's a bummer, because it sets up a fake me/them that doesn't actually exist.

Although honestly it came close. If you want to see every negative stereotype of *Who* people play out over one weekend's worth of ugly behavior, I've got the emails. Just like five years ago, when the same shit ("He recaps [Gossip Girl](#) and [American Idol](#)! Shows about Muggles with talent and social skills, with short skirts and cleavage! How *dare* he not tell us exactly what we want to hear?") was coming down.

And if I were coming into this show cold, like I was five years ago, I could shrug and say, "Nerds, whattaya do," and leave it at that. People who love this show love all of it, and get mad when somebody says that it's exactly what the Muggles think it is: Silly, childish, low budget trash. Most of the time it's not, but occasionally it is. I don't get to pull back and say it's better than that when it's not. I believe in the show. I don't think the bar is "the worst RTD ever did," which seems to be a lot of superfans' new bar for excellence. "At least it wasn't as bad as X RTD episode," they say, or "Seems to me you have a crush on David Tennant." Or, "Every show has a few bad episodes."

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Which confuses me, because I'm not a fan of the franchise, like you guys are: I could give a shit. So comparing this episode to *any* episode, of *any* Doctor, makes no sense to me. This episode, like any episode of any show, could be awesome. Instead, it is shitty. No reference to other writers or actors or eras there. Quality is implicit. Judge on the merits, not on your love of the



franchise or writer or actors involved. They'll still be around. And no, there's not a rule or quota that every show should suck every now and then. "Fear Her" should not exist. This episode should not exist, in its current form. It should be five episodes. There's a whole season contained in this episode, if you wanted to do it right.

But so if I blow off the seriously nasty and deranged tedium that comes out of that, that also means I don't get to own any of the affection and encouragement and strength I've been lucky enough to receive -- before this fucking recaplet shook someone's world to its foundation -- or when I apologized for its faults, earning backlash from a whole other part of the population, because it's all just response to pretty simple input. Validate the fandom: Get a cookie. Point out that the show and the fandom are occasionally exactly what the rest of the world says they are: No cookie. We don't drink the sand because we're thirsty, we drink the sand because we don't know the difference. If I get basement-dweller blowback for taking it seriously, and LARP-dork blowback for not taking it seriously, then the solution is to stop caring altogether. The recaps can only improve. And if you are loving this season, based on two episodes, I'm so happy to hear it, because that means you are happy, and I approve of joy and want more of it in the world. But for me? Man, if I *did* love this show, I'd just be heartbroken this week.

The *Starship UK* floats in a nebula, cardboard buildings blinking like the *Tonight Show* backdrop: Kent, Surrey, Devon. Inside, little kids are lining up at the end of a class day, going one by one past a robot voice giving them praise for their schoolwork. One little ginger kid drags his feet and finally steps up to the robot voice, which is a fortune-teller sort of creepy box like Zoltan, with a smiling cracked man's face inside smiling: "Bad boy, Timmy. Zero," it says, flipping its face around to show an angrier one.

Timmy shivers and stares, and out in the hall his older friend tells him not to get on the "vator" having received a zero: He'll get sent "below." He's confronted by some sort of monk with a winding key around his neck, and the music gets very excited as the friend says she'll wait for him, taking the long way instead of the elevator.

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The robot in the box is called a Smiler. What's it for? Being creepy. No other reason. The monk guy is called a Winder. What's he for? Being creepy. No other reason. They enforce the dominant paradigm of the *Starship UK*, in the creepiest way possible, for no reason. Timmy waits and gets another "vator," once that car's gone, even though she just said not to do it or else he'd be sent below. What's "Below"? Oh, a jolly great area full of tentacles and flames, that exists to be creepy and for no other reason. Timmy asks the "vator" for a ride to London, and then for no real reason a creepy little girl appears on one of the video screens inside, and sings a creepy little song.

*A horse and a man, above, below  
One has a plan, but both must go  
Mile after mile, above, beneath  
One has a smile, and one has teeth  
Though the man above might say hello  
Expect no love from the beast below*

What this means: Nothing, really. And it won't, ever, and that's fine because at this point in the story, all that's important is that hypothetical children perform their duty of jumping behind the couch, so let's scare them with some sing-song and some talking-doll and some scary-monk and some floor-dropping-out and some bad-grades and whatever scares kids. Not to tell a cohesive story with anything like a plot, but just to chunk things at their heads and hope one of the fifteen awesome concepts to which we've already been introduced -- and so many more to come! -- actually sticks.

Because kids are stupid, you know? It's easier to write stories for them, because they don't deserve anything. Give them shitty stories, what's the worst that could happen? They grow up to be shitty adults with no stories to understand their lives with? With no ability to tell stories for themselves? And honestly, if it's that simple -- if it's "for kids" -- then what are any of us doing watching it? It's only "for kids," I've noticed, when it's really poorly done. Tells you a lot, I think, about our attitudes toward children.

The slightly angry face becomes a really angry face, somewhere Timmy can't even see it, and it's all very scary, but if you think that's going somewhere, it's not. Then comes the boring new theme song and ugly font, and finally we get back to the good shit: Amy Pond. Held by the Doctor, by the ankle, floating out of the TARDIS, in space. Hair gone all wild. Amy hoots and hollers about how really they are in space, it really is a spaceship, and the Doctor explains that he's extended the air shell, for her to walkies in space, still wearing her nightie. The Doctor locates their first adventure: In the 29th century, solar flares have roasted the earth, so the entire human race packed its bags and moves out, until the weather improves. Whole nations, he says. Not the end of the world, just a little rest, a little vacation to the stars. This whole time, Amy's holding onto the outside of the TARDIS, calling his name softly, still floating.

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"This is the United Kingdom of Britain and Northern Ireland," the Doctor explains, yanking her inside and showing her the ship. "All of it, bolted together and floating in the sky: Starship UK. It's Britain, but metal." Great line! Then it goes sour, once again: "That's not just a ship, that's an idea. That's a whole country! Living and laughing and... shopping, searching the stars for a new home." After this nod to meaningfulness, there's cutesy back-and-forth verging on flirtation about how the number one rule is that they must not, must never, get involved in the affairs of other people or planets. Get it? Because he always does, that's the joke. That's what serves as a joke.

Amy stares at a little crying girl on the screen, down there in the ship, and compares them to wildlife documentarians: "If they see a wounded cub or something, they can't just save it, they've got to keep filming and let it die. That's got to be hard. I don't think I could do that. Don't you find that hard?" She finally looks away from the little crying girl, but of course the Doctor's already gone.

The set, London Market, is pretty remarkable. An intense amount of hustle for what is probably a fairly small area in reality, lots of colors and clothes, all of it lavish and particular. Amy wanders through it realizing she's really in the future: "I've been dead for centuries." The Doctor calls this gloomy, because he doesn't like to think about that, because he doesn't have to think

about that, and then asks a bunch of Socratic nonsense to get her to figure out something that we, the viewers, can't be expected to have figured out, which means it's just the Doctor being annoying and unnecessarily dramatic, which is on the script:

"Look at this place. Isn't it wrong? Use your eyes, notice everything. What's wrong with this picture? ...Come on, look around you. Actually look...." It goes on for awhile. "Life on a giant starship, back to basics. Bicycles, washing lines, wind-up street lamps. But look closer. Secrets and shadows, lives led in fear. Society bent out of shape, on the brink of collapse. A police state." Oh, right, now that you mention it I see all kinds of "secrets and shadows." Thanks for telling me, rather than showing me, what he is talking about.

Then, just to cram even more mystery and wonder into the story for no reason whatsoever, he snatches somebody's water glass off the table and puts it on the floor and stares at it for awhile, and instead of slapping the shit out of him for being dorky and annoying, the people sit there while he makes a lame joke about how he's looking for an "escaped fish," and then wanders away. The fact that they don't give him a wedgie or toss him out of an airlock for acting like a jackass, that may well be a sign of a police state too.

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And once you've seen the whole episode, yes, all of this makes sense. (Sort of.) My point is that we've now had about ten minutes of nonsense, building up to a future surprise, half of which was spent treating us/Amy like we're idiots for not understanding his mad ravings, which only make sense -- to the extent that they will -- in the context of the episode as a whole. That's not storytelling. That's taking the long way around your ass to get to your elbow, for the sole purpose of cheap emotional manipulation: To make us think something is happening, when in fact nothing is happening. (Did Moffat write "Midnight"? Hang on... Ha! Nope. No, he did not.)

Amy asks why he did that annoying thing with the water -- giving him ample reason and opportunity to, and zero reason not to, explain himself -- and he goes like this, "Dunno, I think a lot. It's hard to keep track. Now, police state. Do you see it yet?" Fuck off. I mean, *maybe* trapped at the bottom of this "police state" nonsense is some idea about how he can't explain himself because of surveillance, but by the same token you wouldn't go around fucking with people's water and being so annoying, so it's a zero sum. And where is the intense evidence of this "police state" business?

Winders report this behavior to a silly woman in a huge red cape, who is herself surrounded by glasses of water and wears a silly *Phantom* mask, and she goes, "Did he do the thing?" Right, so now instead of anybody pointing out that it's a stupid thing to do -- and stolen right from *Jurassic Park* to boot -- we've got another character propping it up, like, yes the thing with the glasses makes sense, but to have her condition of being notified about the Doctor be that he does the exact same thing with the glass of water? Does that make any sense at all in the context of the episode? "Sometime in the next three hundred years, a dude might show up and do this annoying thing I do with the glasses of water"? No, it doesn't. It's just another neat image -- the cape, the mask, the water glasses like candles -- that got plopped into an episode that would have been a lot more interesting and hella more meaningful without half of them.

The evidence for the police state theory is a little girl, crying. Pay attention, this is very important and insightful: "Children cry because they want attention, because they're hurt or afraid. When they cry silently, it's because they just can't stop." If you're wondering where the Doctor gets off telling us about kids, or what any of this has to do with anything except the Very Meaningful Ending, you're not alone: Amy asks him straight up if he's a parent. He doesn't answer. But he does make a very good point, which he could have made twenty literal minutes ago: "Hundreds of parents walking past, and not one of them's asking her what's wrong, which means they already know, and it's something they don't talk about."

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If this were a real story, we would say that the people passing by the little girl are thematically representative of the people of the Starship *UK* as a whole. Except in this metaphor, the little girl is also representative of humanity itself -- the thing the STARWHALE!, who also represents the Doctor, cannot help saving -- which means the little girl is not just the STARWHALE!, in the first metaphor, but also humanity in the second, and in the big sweeping metaphor that we get at the end of the episode, Amelia Pond, because the Doctor is the STARWHALE! and Amelia Pond was one of the human crying children that we, and not-a-stripper Amy, have left behind. This is bad writing, because it establishes no objective correlative for any of this and just makes everything a metaphor for everything else in the attempt to seem valid.

It's also *angry* writing -- wherein Eleven's plaintive "don't grow up!" becomes an angry imperative: "Do *not* grow up. You become worthless at that time" -- Which for me is the bigger problem, because it's not something we've been faced with, last four years, beyond every now and then, because we were dealing with a person who didn't find that puling mewling child-worshipping return-to-retard state, with the golden apples and the unicorns and effin Enya playing, worth returning to.

"The Empty Child"/"The Doctor Dances" -- Little kids who you think are nasty or scary, plus a plucky kid who isn't, turns out they are the children or parent of each other, so stop whining, and meanwhile you got Captain Jack and the Blitz and all kind of concepts happening all over and the Doctor going *whaa?* and then some meaningful shit happens and it's amazing.

"The Girl in the Fireplace" -- Famous figure has a problem with French robots that look amazing, followed by some unprecedented fucking with the Doctor, and him dealing, and her husband, and they are friends, and huge surprise. "Blink" same deal, people we'll never see again, with a *really neat idea* and that's it. "Silence in the Library"/"Forest of the Dead" are less than that, just fifty billion ideas and a nod to the season arc and that is it. And now, what. You're going to give us this bullshit? Way to earn your paycheck. This isn't a jump at excellence and inevitable-but-sad near miss at excellence. This is "They" hand'e me the bloody franchise and praised me bullshit stories, so that must be what they want. A cartoon pint-be-numbers 'cracks in this n that' arc or wha'e'er,' a bit of the Companion bein' muir fucked up thern usual, a bert a' tha dr bein this a that wun he means thus er tha."

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And the crazy thing is, I already knew about all that, and assumed you did too. I thought when I said, "This episode is cocksucking bullshit," that you would know and just assume that I am on your side and still love the show. Because this episode? Cocksucking bullshit. Not just better than this show can offer automatically, but specifically given this season and its stresses, needed to deliver. And instead: Worst episode ever. Worse than farting Slitheen. Worse than fucking Donna (my girl!) Noble dealing with the fucking brain-hand-bullshit-singing-bullshit circle monster tentacle vagina faces, can't even remember their names right now.

And furthermore, we get *another* parallel in the last five minutes of the episode comparing Liz 10's choice in taking her own choice away to Amy's choice in taking away the Doctor's choice, and therefore when accounts are settled, the only metaphor left is that the Doctor is the STARWHALE!, which is tidy in terms of the Doctor/Companion relationship drama, but not exactly compelling we've now looked at the Master/Servant/Savior triangle from about seventy different angles and everybody stands in every position at some point. Plus a bunch of other unrelated shit that only complicates and diffuses it more, to no effect literary or authentic.

And as much as I hated that episode, at least I got it, it made sense in terms of the whole thing *going in*. But here, we haven't even *begun* to unearth "the whole thing," beyond this gaylord "crack" thing, which if I don't get a motherfucking answer by the end of the Angels two-parter about that I will literally spit in your face and leave, because ain't nobody making me wait as long as I wanted in the first place, where "The Long Game" started, and I stopped bitching.

Secrets. They're not helping her, so it's something they're afraid of. Shadows. Whatever they're afraid of, it's nowhere to be seen, which means it's everywhere. Police state. *Where'd she go?* the Doctor wonders, having [snerched](#) this one little girl's crying person for her identity. As though -- and I do appreciate this about this episode -- she wouldn't notice, when the UK is already about your "papers," in a way we Americans don't quite understand but a Brit would automatically: He's snerched her shit, and thinks she's doesn't know. And she's let him, because she needs one grownup, or almost, to pick up the slack.

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So knowing this, or not knowing it, the Doctor sends Amy off to find this little girl according to her papers. And he notes, giving meaning to those robot smiling things: "Ask her about those things, the smiling fellows in the booths. They're everywhere... They're clean. Everything else here is battered and filthy -- look at this place -- but no one's laid a finger on those booths. Not a footprint within two feet of them."

And yes, that's where the theoretics of the Doctor and the poetics of this show intersect, and we the audience know something real has happened, is happening. Because even knowing what's to come, even knowing all of this is a shadowplay for the amazingness of the Doctor and Amy's take on him -- I do understand that this little girl is important, and we're in a political situation, and when the people walk by it's not because they don't hear or don't care about her crying, but something bigger. (My problem is that we could have known, you an I, all that from watching a couple people walk by her while she was crying, and this episode would have been rational. We would have cared. Not to say that Horrible Liz Ten wouldn't have fucked it all up again.)

"Ask Mandy, 'Why are people scared of the things in the booths?'" The Doctor explains, and Amy wigs because she's still in her nightie. "It's this or Leadworth," he says, to foreshadow some nasty bullshit he'll play for no reason later. "What do you think? Let's see. What will Amy Pond choose?" It's a total mystery; he's so dumb on the page that he's actually willing to pretend to be unwillingly surprisingly compassionate, in this moment. Like he would have loved her, at this age or as Amelia, if she were the kind of person that wouldn't go on this adventure. He runs off to do more gay shit with waterglasses, and leaves her to it. Hopefully this Mandy will also act like a character in a ridiculously unrealistic storybook, even though she's as young as Amelia who acted her age, and Amy will get to interface with that instead of having a real situation.

"So is this how it works, Doctor? You never interfere in the affairs of other peoples or planets, unless there's children crying?" Um, yes. If the script is retarded and makes no sense, and is just a succession of opportunities for you to be a bad-ass as narrowly defined by the "all bad-asses are one bad-ass" rule of non-storytelling, you'll be fine. And because you are gorgeous, talented, intelligent people who are capable of playing the Doctor and Amy Pond respectively, you will do fucking brilliantly and powerfully no matter what bullshit the script of the week throws at you.

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Never think I stopped loving these two, and all the other actors: They're just doing an amazing job with what they've been handed, and that is a bummer. There could be thirteen hour-long experiences of beauty, for these beautiful brilliant people, and instead they're just... Doing their jobs. Really, really well. So if I *were* a fan of the show, I could hold onto that, because they are fantastic, no matter how much I bitch and moan. They sell this shit better than I ever could, and I love them.

I thought I was done, falling in love, when I met Donna. I really did. "Rose was my wonderful beloved, and Martha was the person I wish to be, but Donna. Oh, Donna. I fell in love with her immediately, and never stopped. She'd step out onto some ridiculous planet and I'd weep anyhow, because I loved her so much I couldn't wait to see her deal with the Ood (that's the one, right) or Agatha Christie or whatever. Loved her, body and soul." And all that. But after a year of Tennant fuckin' about, I realized I was ready to fall in love again.

And I got Matt and Karen! The two awesomest people! And I will tell you, no matter how much I hate it -- and I swear this week is as bad as it gets, although next week is bullshit too -- I don't care beyond that. The only reason it seems different is because I skipped over the parts I hated, when I was telling you how much I loved Martha, and Donna. You didn't get to hear how bad it got, how mad I got. The only difference is that we're back week-to-week. And this episode, more than next week and slightly less than last week, is bullshit. It can get better. I believe without even trying that next week and the week after that, and the week after that, will be amazing. And when I say this episode is retarded, just complete and utter trash, that's all I'm saying. I believe it can be better. And in the case of this show, *I know it will*. To me, that is a powerful statement. I'm not sure what's complicated about it, or what I didn't say about that to lead you astray otherwise. I am always willing to wait until next week. I wish you would, too.



The little girl spots Amy immediately, because she dropped her papers in the first place so the Doctor would leave her alone. They aimlessly -- although you would think Mandy would know more specifically -- wander the halls until they reach a place you're not supposed to go. The only point of this scene, of course, is that Amy does a lot of *hoo-hoo* and *hee-hee* trying to tempt the girl beyond the red line and into the "hole" where all the previous shit leads.

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Now, again, symbolically we're in easy territory: The thing that makes Amy special is that she doesn't give a fuck. And in the context of this society, it's essential that she doesn't give a shit. So it's no surprise that Mandy is terrified and Amy -- the newborn, the time traveler for the first time -- doesn't give a shit about her terror. And of course, because she is spunky and -- let's face it -- awesome, she lifts the curtain and the rope and heads right into the tent, silly faces getting angry, while Mandy spouts well-intentioned world-building nonsense ("There's a travel pipe down by the airlocks, if you've got stamps") and Amy woggles eyebrows at her adorably. "Don't mind me, never could resist a Keep Out sign," she says, and scoffs when she hears we don't talk about it: "Because you're not supposed to, you don't? Watch and learn."

Before she's gone there's some Scots humor that you either get or you don't -- "Scotland's got to be here somewhere."/"No. They wanted their own ship."/"Nothing changes." -- that should and almost does reify Amy Scottish-in-Leadworth personality -- as a metaphor for the Doctor from last week -- but not really. They giggle about how the Doctor is her friend and he's a boy but he's not her boyfriend, and she says about her marriage: "A long time ago, tomorrow morning. I wonder what I did." Which is a truly Moffat statement ("long time ago tomorrow") crossed with an arc thought that actually matters but not this week, and finally she throws herself into the tent, where the Hole and thus the Story are located. Proper response if you're taking part in a fairytale, which she is, but needlessly bullshit when the story is not playing by the rules because we have to hit fifty other awesome ideas before there's a point.

You know, chances are if you've read this far you're one of two categories: Trigger-Happy Jack or Drive-By À Go-Go. You know somebody, or love somebody, or are somebody, who is relentlessly negative. They say no to everything. And I don't want to be that guy. I am not that guy. This episode sucks, but that's not a categorical Comic Book Guy no-no-no to everything that happens. That Trigger-Happy Jack is not a role I would ever play. And I feel like in Nerd Country, you're one or the other. Either you say no to everything, or you sit there and listen to that guy say no to everything. You're the victim of the drive-by. As people who love nerds and those Jacks, we get used to it. But that's not how I'm feeling. I believe every week for every show is a chance to be excellent. Regardless of what came before or what comes after. Hating this episode has zero to do with the show before this point and zero to do with what comes after. I don't know if I was clear about that, before. Maybe I thought it went without saying.

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Anyway, Amy jumps down the hole and Mandy doesn't. Mandy's horrified. Doesn't even want to talk about it. Which is exactly where Amy belongs, because she's more "fuck it" than the Doctor ever was. He's not her boyfriend -- she's getting married, "most definitely," a long time ago tomorrow morning, hopefully before this season ties itself together -- and before Mandy's done

screaming she's in the tent, which becomes Wardrobe-like something new: A tentacle, draped in social interest cloth. And she backs up, without standing up, on her heels, away from it, and when she comes back there's standing in the circle a bunch of Winders, the monk ones, wearing an onyx ring that will never mean anything. And she loses consciousness.

Meanwhile the Doctor is hopping around even lower, listening to the hiss and the smell of the starship's works, confused and wondering about the glass of water before him: The way it doesn't move, or vibrate. The red-cowl woman, masked, talks to him like an operative, and asks what it means to him, why he looked at the waterglass and came here, to the engine room: No movement, no ripples. He shows Red Riding Hood the empty pointless cupboards and shelving, all the pieces that should make the *UK* move, disconnected and sparking into space. If the engine was working, they agree, the water would ripple. But it doesn't. (Never mind that what's actually moving the ship, in a hundred ways, would do this for them.) "The impossible truth in a glass of water," the masked figure says, and just like that we accept as an "impossible truth," only observable through the irritating actions of the Doctor, according to the script.

She tells him to keep quiet, because "they're everywhere," and they go on to have a conversation that is every bit as elliptical and annoying as anything he's said before. The glasses of water don't X, therefore something is Y. They talk about this at length, but don't really say anything, because that would give away the immense and ridiculous magic truth behind it all. And just when she's acting as insufferable as the Doctor, agreed that "the impossible truth" they've both mentioned several times and we're not allowed to know about exists, and how there's a "darkness at the heart of this nation," she takes off again, saying only that she's Liz 10, and will pop back up for no real reason at no real time, later in the narrative, because she's a huge secret for no reason at all.

Ignore the menacing ten Winders (monk guys) from the last time we saw her, they've all left Amy alone because the only point was to make the scene break fascinating and exciting, but have no effect on the story, as it happens. Amy wakes up in a particular place with one of those Smilers watching her, and it welcomes her to a voting booth. She's identified as Amelia Jessica Pond, age 1,306, and therefore -- she's lovely in this moment -- eligible to vote. Takes a while to verify her marital status, keeping her and us on tenterhooks, before telling her the only truth she is allowed to know given the particulars of this show and Doctor and season: Unknown.

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Video screen guy goes, "You are here because you want to know the truth about this Starship, and I am talking to you because you're entitled to know. When this presentation has finished, you will have a choice. You may either Protest or Forget. If you choose to Protest, understand this: If just 1% of the population of this ship do likewise, the program will be discontinued, with consequences for you all. If you choose to accept the situation -- 'and we hope that you will -- then press the Forget button. All the information I am about to give you will be erased from your memory. You will continue to enjoy the safety and amenities of Starship *UK*, unburdened by the knowledge of what has been done to save you."

Which is lovely, and not that far off -- in reality or showtime -- from the ugliness perpetrated in "The Long Game." The difference being that, in this case, it doesn't mean a whole lot and in that

story it was the key to everything. What he's saying has already been said, and better, by the Doctor earlier in the episode. And since we're begging the question -- the healing of Albion, literally -- there should be some payoff, I mean, this is the legitimate and fundamental truth of government. You walk away from Omelas or you don't. But this fundamental concept of being an aware and adult human becomes -- like so much of the beautiful and meaningful concepts in this episode -- one more awesome fuckin' idea. Omelas is equal to Smilers and Winders and Smile-Winders and STARWHALE!s and Abdication and Liz 10 and everything else.

We *do* choose to Forget. And kids watching this episode, they deserve to see a story where there's a Big Red Button (remember?) labeled FORGET, so that ten years from now they'll think, *Ah, just like that wonderful story with the Smilers and Winders. I should always choose PROTEST rather than FORGET.* But this episode itself is so shitty, and fans of this show are so ridiculously hidebound and needy, that the message gets lost. A person who chooses PROTEST in terms of this shitty episode? They need to be silenced, attacked, hated, vilified; their foster home history and sexual trauma and Amazon Wishlist all need to be revisited, real-life shit needs to be attacked, just to silence anybody that says, "Occasionally this fictional franchise doesn't meet the high bar, or the low one." It's more important to go along with the crowd -- within the tiny, silly, self-selected, virginal, hateful crew -- than it is to have thoughts or opinions that run counter to the voice of LINDA. No wonder this episode was so divisive! Drink the sand, or don't drink at all.

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"Here, then, is the truth about Starship UK, and the price that has been paid for the safety of the British people. May God have mercy on our souls."

And then a thing happens that is completely obvious, if you've ever seen a TV show before, but seems to be completely mystifying for most viewers: Rather than seeing Amy watch the video in question, make an informed decision, film a post-memento message to herself, and then wipe her own memory, we experience this subjectively: The images scan across her brain, and we see her hand hit FORGET, and obviously what's happened is that she's made the choice. Unless you're hidebound and needy and unimaginably unsophisticated -- unless you are the kind of person we're talking about, in other words, who *doesn't even understand the thing they're making themselves ugly to defend* -- in which case the one cool thing in this episode passes you by. Next thing you know Past Amy is onscreen saying, "This isn't a trick. You've got to find the Doctor and get him back to the TARDIS. Don't let him investigate. Stop him. Do whatever you have to. Just please, please get the Doctor off this ship!"

Well, what would you do? The Doctor appears out of nowhere, as the message she doesn't remember leaving plays from the beginning, and she shuts it down. All told, the Doctor figures -- having sonicked the light fixture, like that's not stupid as shit -- she's lost about twenty minutes. And why would she forget? Because everybody does, even citizens 1300 years gone. I mean, what a fuckin' brilliant, awesome metaphor. And if it got more than three seconds in the episode, like say the story it deserves, we'd be handjobbing the fandom out the wang. Instead, we get her frozen face and then her hand pressing FORGET, and even the good ideas go sailing over our heads.

Mandy explains that you're only eligible to vote once you're sixteen, at which point you vote and renew your vote every five years. Maybe this happens to coincide with some British thing, I don't care enough to check because this shit is retarded. In case you didn't get it -- or thought it was so stupid you must have missed something, you faithful few -- the Doctor snorts, "Everyone chooses to forget what they've learned. Democracy in action!" I love it when the Doctor makes idiotic irrelevant judgments about 2010, don't you? God forbid somebody take a photo with their camera, Granddad.

Mandy asks if the obnoxious cluelessness is due to the Doctor being Scots, and for once he tells the total truth: "Oh, I'm way worse than Scottish!" Not only can he not vote, he can't even see the mysterious movie Amy saw in those seconds we were unable to process the obvious shit going on right in front of us, because it was so poorly filmed. In case you're confused -- and why wouldn't you be, since it's the central conceit of the entire fucking show, regardless of how this conversation meant something completely different last episode when it was a major turning point in their relationship -- this is because the Doctor is an ALIEN. He is a TIME LORD from GALLIFREY, which is a PLANET that is not EARTH. Alien. There used to be *some*, now there's just *one*. Except when there's not.

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The Doctor gives a whole long fucking boring speech about things, dangles a bunch of end-free sentences in front of Amy, whatever's as annoying and pointless as possible and then changes the subject so he can go literally, "Hold tight, we're bringing down the government. Say Wheee!" as the Smiler goes from Angry to Angrier to Incredibly Angry, and meanwhile upstairs Liz 10 pulls off her face and makes the little girl giggle because guess what: No point in her having a mask whatsoever. Isn't that jolly.

The Doctor and Amy are in the stomach of a beast below. It's gross and stupid, because children are gross and stupid and we assume they like stupid shit, so they like stupid shit. But I doubt any children -- chronologically-- are reading this, so fuck it.

...Some time later, after yet more intensely uncreative robberies from both *Star Wars* and my favorite line of dialogue of all time (*Farscape's* "Ride out on the wave of the vomit in front of the vomit"), so they can roll around in it and eventually sonic screwdriver this and buzzy wiggle that and she's now in her nightie and sodden with vomit. Droll.

Doctor asks some more random Smilers that are there for no reason, and they go smiley-angry-angriest and then stand up and are beadies, but then Liz 10 in her cape and mask shows up and zaps them and she knows who Amy is for no reason ("She's very brave," the Doctor supplies) while the Queen acts like a jackass forever and ever and says she knows what the Doctor is and she's so pretty and she's not technically a British subject but he fucked her ancestor the Virgin Queen and whatever whatever, Torchwood and whatnot, and it's like, she was waiting for him to do something instead of doing something, but she knew he would steal somebody's glass of water and put it on the floor and then she goes, "Basically, I rule," and it's really stupid and embarrassing and dorky because get it? She rules, and she rules. Except she

doesn't? And she... Doesn't. So just like last week, it's grody because stop telling me how cool you are and start doing cool shit.

She growls, the Queen, and they all head down the corridor, wherever they are that she randomly found them, and Amy remembers fuckin' five seconds ago when she left herself that message, and it's all very tense, and meanwhile the Winders and librarian-looking dudes are putting all kinds of "protocols" into place and I mean, if you haven't by this point figured out Concept #1110 of this week, which is that the living regent Liz 10 herself is in charge of all this and clearly has pressed one or more FORGET buttons in her past so this whole thing -- like every other scene -- is useless and pointless in pursuit of the final two or three VERY MEANINGFUL SCENES, then congratulations: You're exactly as fucking stupid as this episode needs you to be.

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At some point in the identical cheap sets that they keep tromping through again and again like they're going somewhere and not just playing *Scooby Doo* with that same vase flashing by, Amy points out the interesting but apparently heretofore discountable fact that previously, there was a huge fucking hole in the ground and there was a giant tentacle poking up and trying to grab her and waving around and being generally surprising. Liz 10 is sort of surprised, but cockface Doctor is like, "Duh, that's totally what we're here for, because this monster is invading all the whatever of this ship and it's like tree roots but with tentacles" and whatever nonsense that nobody could possibly know. Liz and Doc get very angry because somebody is feeding some bodies to it, and they continue to mosey down those same identical halls but like slightly faster.

Amy has some memories about how she specifically told herself not to do this, but then she does. The Doctor is sex on a stick so it's easy to blow off. Then they go to Liz's stupid place with a million water glasses -- Winders initiating all sorts of needlessly portentous protocols as they watch on video -- and how come she has all these water glasses? How much more would I respect it if she just said, "Lends a certain air to the place," but instead she gays it up about how "every single day" her "government" is up to something, and for some reason she can't fucking work it out and deal with it. I don't blame her. There's literally no reason for the Smilers, or the Winders, or the "vators" or the tentacles or anything, beyond "this might be kickass" -ness, so I can see why the Queen would be a bit bewildered.

"A queen going undercover to investigate her own kingdom?" the Doctor explains to us morons, and all of a sudden there's a whole other meaningless metaphor and pointlessly discarded concept. She bitches about how she's been fighting the power -- which is her -- by not fighting the power -- which is also her -- for ten years, and yet here comes the white male Doctor and isn't he something. There's some bullshit about how she's older than she looks, because somebody -- Who? Why? -- stopped her aging at some random age or was it some other age, point being she's got this mask, from the first scene where she... Had a mask. So now it means something. Like the water glasses. Liz is like, what's the big deal with my mask? "So what?" And the fucking Doctor goes, "Oh, Liz. So everything."

Because see how it makes things awesome *one day*, if you're needlessly obfuscatory and jackassy now? It's like foreshadowing, only the shadow comes first causally, and doesn't necessitate or necessarily imply the *fore* in any way except as pointless manipulation toward a pointless end. "Oh, everybody. So *everything*." ...Which I won't tell you, or do more than vaguely hint at, because then this shitty episode would be five minutes long.

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At this point things get kinda cool, with the Winders "escorting" Liz 10, cool concept vs. cool concept, to the "interior workings" of the starship. One of the Winders, who have no purpose as far as we can tell, flips his human face around to reveal a Smiler face behind his head. Which again, would be cool if we knew what either thing meant beyond vague steampunky futurism, and which more importantly means that you can now buy *three* toys: The Smiler, the Winder, and the Sminderface toy, which has both. Everybody acts like this escort is a huge infringement even though Liz 10 once again points out that she's the Queen and they're over and over like, "Yeah, it's the Queen that told us to do this, which is you."

They go to the "lowest point of Starship *UK*," the Tower of London, and she yells at some random Winder we recognize as the guy who's been pulling all the secret shit. What the episode has failed to show us but is now essential to understand is that all of this, the whole episode somehow, has been about getting Liz to the Tower of London so she can do something. Except they didn't do anything but watch her on every camera, and tell her when the Doctor was doing dumb shit with water glasses, and then try to kill her for no reason like eleven times, so she could act like a badass and tell us how *a, b, c...n = x* she "rules."

Why are there kids in the dungeon? Specifically, let's say, the kid from the first *very scary sequence in the 'vator' who was apparently in no danger whatsoever at any time?* Oh, no reason. "Protesters and citizens of limited value" are fed to "the beast," but it won't eat kids. (CRYING kids? Silently crying little kids, maybe?) The Doctor tosses around yet more moral high ground about this situation as though it's real or has bearing, and then starts in with his pointlessly cryptic shit once again, with all the cast posing as straight man, Excellent Questions excised because they are obvious:

"Except it's not a torture chamber, is it? Depends on your angle... Like I say, depends on the angle. It's either the exposed pain center of Big Fella's brain, being tortured relentlessly... Or it's the gas pedal, the accelerator. Starship *UK*'s go-faster button. Don't you [understand]? Try, go on. The spaceship that could never fly, no vibration on deck. This creature -- this poor, trapped, terrified creature -- it's not infesting you, it's not invading, it's what you have instead of an engine. And this place down here is where you hurt it, where you torture it, day after day, just to keep it moving. Tell you what. Normally, it's above the range of human hearing. This is the sound none of you wanted to hear!"

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He makes the screaming of the SPACEWHALE audible, and they all bitch and moan, because it's so hard for the working class to believe that blah, blah, Tory blah. The Queen announces out of nowhere that they will release the SPACEWHALE and nobody does anything. So the Doctor is



pointlessly cryptic again: "Liz. Your mask. Look at it. It's old. At least 200 years old, I'd say... An antique made by craftsmen over 200 years ago and perfectly sculpted to your face. They slowed your body clock, all right, but you're not 50. Nearer 300. And it's been a long old reign."

Liz, who we barely know and certainly don't care about any more than the Doctor does, who might as well be setting glasses of water on her face for all the irritating nonsense he's shoveling, explains the thing that the Winders and Sminders have essentially been saying all episode, which is that Liz has *Memento* disease and has been acting like V for Vendetta in an endless ten-year cycle for three hundred years, always coming back around to her own version of the FORGET/PROTEST button, but in her case -- Lovingly created by whom? And pristinely preserved for her every ten years by whom? -- so she can choose between FORGET and ABDICATE. Get it? Because anarchy or some shit. But how ironic, because the ruling class makes the same decision time and again that the proletariat do, because ABDICATE apparently means the Starship crashes instantly and flies apart.

I get it, I do. And I *love* it. The hard decision of rule is deciding who lives and dies and who pays the price. Except it's even more symbolic and shite than "The Long Game," so it means nothing, because at least in that one nobody had any power. Now it's just the *idea* of several previous episodes, of this and every TV show ever made, presuming their power through reference instead of actually creating substance.

Any day of the week you can find Tolkien knockoffs on the internet, oh reddish-blond half-elf with a beard like my *Krull*-lookin' Weis-Hickman *Talisman/Cataan*-playing LARPer-boyfriend fantasies come true; skinny elves that look like Liv Tyler saying *Gil síla na lû govaded*. You can find entire novels about when and where Boba Fett masturbates, and onto which of his many wolf-shaped plushies, with the aid of any number of officious ambassadorbots or hardy Ewoks or seven-foot natives of Kashyyyk. Love that shit! No I am not immune and yes I'm still holding out for my personal Tanthalas Kanan of Qualinost to rescue me from *all this*. But to ape a story of elves, or Queens, or politics, or masturbating assassins, is not to tell a story of any of these things, or indeed a story at all. It's playing with somebody else's toys, in somebody else's sandbox. Or, like this episode and most Moffat episodes, bring your towel, because we're doing all of the toys and all of the sandboxes in all of the universes at once.

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"If you are watching this... If I am watching this, then I have found my way to the Tower Of London. 'The creature you are looking at is called a Starwhale [what?!]. Once, there were millions of them. They lived in the depths of space and, according to legend, guided the early space travelers through the asteroid belts. This one, as far as we are aware, is the last of its kind. And what we have done to it breaks my heart. The Earth was burning. Our sun had turned on us, and every other nation had fled to the skies. Our children screamed as the skies grew hotter. And then it came, like a miracle. The last of the starwhales. We trapped it. We built our ship around it, and we rode on its back to safety. If you wish our voyage to continue, then you must press the Forget button. Be again the heart of this nation, untainted. If not, press the other button. Your reign will end, the Starwhale [for real!] will be released, and our ship will disintegrate. I hope I keep the strength to make the right decision."

Everybody wonders why they voted for that, because none of them remember it, although it is obvious in every way. Amy particularly is weirded out, so much so that the Doctor has to explain her own personal shit to her. And wouldn't you know, it's all about him: "Because you knew if we stayed here, I'd be faced with an impossible choice. Humanity or the alien. You took it upon yourself to save me from that. And that was wrong. You don't ever decide what I need to know." He gives her fifty million demerits and his adorable face gets all scrunchy and when he threatens to take her home in a sec maybe you think maybe her amazing adventure is going to end with this one bullshit poorly written episode. And then you remember it's not, because what about how she's fucked in the head, and that stupid Crack In Things pretending it's a storyline even when it's literally nothing more than an image drawn onto the last five minutes of every episode to make you think there's a cohesive moment sneakin' up on you eventually, so it's fine.

"Because I made a mistake? One mistake? I don't even remember doing it. Doctor!" He's like yeah, you're human, you're only human, and thus sets up a fake me/them that doesn't actually exist, so Amy can fix it in a second. And then fix and fix and fix it until you're so bored by his love of humanity that you kind of wish he would turn on Us. So he gives this big stupid going-nowhere speech about how THIS TIME and only THIS TIME he is faced with an IMPOSSIBLE CHOICE between euthanizing/murdering the Spacewhale, and NOT DOING SO, but either way it is going to RIP HIM TO THE CORE because if he isn't a protector of innocent pieces of meat on loan from *Torchwood* episodes long past that scream when you point at them, then what is he? Humanity can suck it, because they are being mean to this thing, even though they don't even know they're doing it, because they keep forgetting it, and isn't that so fucking human, or something, so once he makes this INTENSE CHOICE how can he ever, EVER, call himself the Doctor again, when he's...

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Whatever, it's so stupid. So Amy, having picked up his worst habits, grabs Liz's hand and smashes it down on the ABDICATE button instead of explaining her thought processes or anything that would make this episode less arbitrary and silly, and Liz is like WOT and Doctor's like WOT and Amy's like, "Wot? Y'know w'ah mean" and then it turns out that this whole pointless plot has been for naught because in fact, she has figured out, the SPACEWHALE! is actually kind and doesn't need to be abused. Yes, that's right:

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE SERVANT CLASS, THEY LOVE IT. FRANKLY, THEY'D DO IT FOR FREE!

Turns out way back when Earth was getting solar-fried, *all the nations of Earth except for some reason Britain and North Ireland* got left behind. Literally everybody built a spaceship without benefit of SPACEWHALE! except for this one island and extra Anglican part of an island. And I guess the rest of the entire world was like, "Seeya! Thanks for Eddie and Pats, suckas!"

And Starship *NAFTA* was all about beating up on Mexico and Canada added an arm, and they called it the Starship *Sprawl* because eventually William Gibson will always be right, and Starship *Indian Subcontinent* handled tech support, and Starship *Scandinaviasdottir* was like, "Stop being weird, Iceland!" and Starship *Israel* found the time to plant a bunch of trees while beating up Starship *Palestine* and Starship *NAFTA Sprawl* was like "We're not sure how we feel

about that but Starship *Brasil* better stop touching my junk" and Starship *Kiwi* was like, "We're not fucking Australia!" and even in the midst of all this, nobody cared about Starship *UK* with their weird little dinghy the Welsh Starship *Dyffyrddwigwamddankyumam*. So they were fucked.

But then -- JUST LIKE THE ALIEN DOCTOR ALL ALONE IN SPACE -- the STARWHALE! heard the British children crying out, some for potatoes and others for fried intestine, and decided to rescue them. So it made all manner of ridiculous SPACEWHALE! noises, and couldn't let them keep crying, so it offered itself as a living breathing carnival attraction, with the one caveat that you not torture it and set up incredibly complicated memory clone scenarios with a bunch of Very Important Ethical Buttons, but I guess that last part got lost somewhere along the way, because for no reason the Starship *UK* decided to thank its STARWHALE! underbelly by subjecting it to horrific pain and feeding it normal people, delicious, and also children, which it simply would not eat, because why? Because it's JUST LIKE THE DOCTOR and CRYING CHILDREN.

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So Amy explains this and her absurdly unexplained actions about eleventy-million times, and everybody has a good cry and pats the old STARWHALE! on the belly for being such a good sport after three *hundred years* of abuse and all it can say is, "I'm simply pleased as punch simply just to be here! In fact, let me continue carrying your entire country on my back until you're done, because I don't mind the three hundred years of pointless torture. Thanks for explaining that obvious thing we all missed for a hundred generations, Amy Pond." It's all quite political.

The Doctor gives her a mile and a half of shit anyway, even though she saved him from a pointless moral struggle within himself that never really existed except for the five minutes necessary to make an amazing speech about how powerful and central and essential all of this is to the philosophy of realness and various other things we've already exhausted in the last five years of exploring his character, but in the end he relents because she tells him for the fiftieth time about how he's JUST LIKE STARWHALE! because he's old and lonely and loves crying Earthlings, and finally he gives in and he's like, "I really do."

At which point, if this were a story, we would think for one second about the opposite side of this analogy, which is that the first person he ever saw and imprinted on was Amelia Pond, the Girl Who Waited. She didn't cry, because she was awesome, but she did need him terribly bad. And he let her down. And maybe this applies, a little girl singing a song that's finally whole -- that like Amy, eventually we hope, is healed:

*In bed above, we're deep asleep  
While greater love lies further deep  
This dream must end  
This world must know  
We all depend on the beast below*

And if we hadn't suffered another thematic whiplash, if the SPACEWHALE! wasn't suddenly our Doctor, I would say that little bit brought a tear to my eye. We do depend. Our dreams depend. The World Must Know. It's all quite political, but if there's a point, that little song -- not the

pointless Smilers or the slightly less-pointless Winders or the Sminders or the wasted wonder of Liz 10 or the beauty of the Starship *UK*, a nation that is also an idea that is also a beautiful living creature, all of whose parts depend now upon each other, knowingly, for survival, none high and none lower -- if there's a point, that little song is it. Don't forget where you came from.

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But I'm not willing to admit the truth of that song, or the tear in my eye, or my love of this show, or my heartbreak when it doesn't perform to my specifications. Because, you see, that would mean I care. And I promised not to care. Not about you, not about this stupid show. That's not my job: I don't love anymore. I jeer.

So I will say instead that the Crack spread, across time and space and every adventure, and even shows up at the end of this episode, across the hull of the Starship *UK*. But instead of pointing out that obvious corollary, we get a call from Winston Churchill, for no real reason, so we can fly to him in the Blitz and not run into Nine/Rose/Jack while we have a boring toy-introducing prostitute adventure with Daleks that manages to have zero to do with Churchill, the Blitz, or Daleks.

And then, I hear, things get good. I've said it before and I'll say it again: I love Eleven. I love Amy. I love Moffat, for "Fireplace" if nothing else. I am willing to give this show a chance, week in and week out. Every episode has the option of being wonderful. I hope and need for it to do so. Why not give me the same option? Why not class up the joint just this once and hold back on the nasty mean pathetic bullshit? And also, not to mention: Everything that's happened in these two episodes is gloriously, wonderfully open for later development. Jeff's laptop, Amelia's mysteries, Rory's job as a healer, the duckpond, the Cracks.

This time five years ago, we were just edging up on "The Long Game" -- we'd just closed the deal on two weeks of farting Slitheen (one of whom I fell in love with later, and ended up if you remember handing me the keys to the TARDIS at the end of S1) and the ghosts of Dickens and aliens made of fat and oh! A bunch of shit I couldn't handle. But what happened next is, I fell in love. I joined you; I presumed to join you; I'd like another chance. I'd like to invite you along with me, and I'm sorry if I hurt you: Let's fall in love again.

<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/victory-to-the-daleks-...>

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Air raid sirens are going off and dust is shaking from the ceiling, and everybody in Churchill's bunker is running around. They're beautifully dressed and they all have those cute British accents, but my question is this: If you look up in the sky are you going to see [Rose hanging from a dirigible](#)? That story was written by Steven Moffat, and this one by [Mark Gatiss](#) (whom I'll always love for *Nighty Night*), but I mean, given that the Blitz is like the most interesting thing that ever happened in London -- my favorite writer has focused not one but two novels (three if you're counting the halves) plus an amazing short story on it, and seems at times to view all time travel as an oblique way to talk about it no matter how much I loved Kivrin -- you could conceivably place every episode of this show somewhere in it. But... Do you really need to?

Especially for such an ill-conceived and bizarrely paced exercise in merchandising as this? Because add the dodgy denouement -- every bit as obnoxious as the heartfelt sighs and rising violins that attended [STARWHALE!](#)'s discovery and eventual hilarious succor -- and you've got basically three or four pretty crappy stories, lashed end-to-end by bits of string and chewing gum.

Story A: The Daleks are not Daleks. So the Doctor acts the fool in a really unconvincing, frankly obnoxious way, and then they're Daleks again. Story B: In the middle of World War II is *exactly* the time to make a joke about racial purity, using the Dalek's least interesting qualities, to no real end. Story C: Buy these shitty new color-coded Daleks and don't give your parents a moment of peace until they do. And Story D: A bomb that is a person, who simply *stops being a robot* due entirely to the power of luuuuuv. Which: Why not just have somebody run through London with [the Olympic torch](#)? From what I hear, it's *much more than a torch now, it's a beacon! It's a beacon of hope! And fortitude! And courage! And it's a beacon... Of love!*

Anyway, this piece of shit. It's not as bad as last week's, and next week finally gets us on track to a certain extent, but I can't believe we're going to sit here discussing it when we could be, I don't know, hanging from a dirigible. They all run around listening to the radio and complaining about this and that and being super British ("If wishes were kisses, luv!") and not really showing the Spirit of the Blitz and whatever, and some guy who's barely even the ghost of a strange bulldog-human hybrid that once met Churchill and pissed on his shoes blammers out, through his wobbling fat face, "Roll out the secret weapon!" And they push a tiny model Dalek across the war table, and deal with that why don't you.

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The Doctor exits the TARDIS to the welcome of many guns, and then that stupid Churchill impersonator with the squinty eye and the chomping cigar hanging out his mouth pushes through his men and smiles at the Doctor, and the Doctor runs into his arms and they giggle and pet each other like dachshunds, and I mean, what is the point of even having Churchill in this episode if it's just going to be a weird joke about Churchill? Dickens, [Shakespeare](#), [Reinette](#), the various Queens: They were all involved, real people, who took part in the stories. This is just like those creepy robot dolls at Disneyland or the Mormon Temple that talk when the light shines on their creepy faces. *Plus* he reminds me of Baron Harkonnen for some reason.

...Wait. He totally *was* the Baron Harkonnen. How retarded. And I'm sure any number of Anglophiles can't wait to inform themselves and each other that Ian McNeice is a national treasure, because any British actor that makes it past fifty becomes a global institution for some reason -- I think, essentially, "I have heard of his name!" or "I saw him in some Jane Austen retread!" or "He was in one episode of that goddamned show where the guy is a cop!" is generally enough reason to make this claim, not that I'm any closer to understanding what the big fucking deal about Bernard Cribbins actually *is* -- but in this case, it's a fail.

And not entirely, but mostly, his fault, because it's cardboard cutout with no reason to be in the story, and no heft or depth to the character beyond winking at Amy and being winked at in turn, as she goggle-eyes at him about how much she's learned and how important history is from how he stood around harrumphing around his cigar while incredibly stupid things happened for an hour. Which is, you know, why actors have jobs: To *add a soul* to the words on the paper. Even if those words are sparse and fairly meaningless.

So for no reason I can see, the Baron tries to requisition the Doctor's TARDIS key, and they do a lot of You Old Bastard finger-wagging in each other's faces, and Churchill's all, "Think of what I could achieve with your remarkable machine, Doctor! The lives that could be saved!" Which, was Churchill known for coveting remarkable machines and I'm not getting it? Is there a reason he would be sneaky and creepy about the TARDIS? I am fully willing to admit it; my historical knowledge is entirely limited to things like murdered heiresses and who Lord Byron fucked and the details of most battles of Alexander's campaign against Persia, but other than that it's just a whooshing chasm filled with pop music and celebrity meltdowns. Even still, I never got the sense that Winston was the type to steal your time machine.

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"So you've changed your face again," Churchill says, lest we get confused about basic shit on how this show operates, and the Doctor goes, "Yeah, well, had a bit of work done," which makes no sense either in his context or Winston's, but whatever, and then they (Amy) are so happy to be in the war room they can't stand it, and Winston bitches because he called the Doctor a month ago but he's just now showing up. (This timey-wimey problem of the TARDIS doesn't seem to extend past this episode, if you were wondering; I got really anxious thinking it would happen all season or else I wouldn't mention it.) But why did he call the Doctor? We'll never really know.

Churchill's staff of high-ranking military officials is mostly women and disabled minorities, as was the custom in those days, but that doesn't stop him from getting all up in one lady's grill to ask her what's wrong -- nothing -- and to yell Harkonnenishly in her face, "Action this day, Breen! Action this day!" She smiles at Amy nervously before leaving, again for reasons we may or may not figure out later, and takes off. A dude approaches with a report or whatever, and Churchill finally explains why the Doctor's here. Sort of. Except without the "explaining" part.

"I have something to show you. We stand at a crossroads, Doctor! Quite alone, with our backs to the wall. Invasion is expected daily. So I will grasp with both hands anything that will give us an advantage over the Nazi menace." I mean, I guess we're drawing a connection between the TARDIS and the Ironsides -- yes? -- and just how desperate things got there, for awhile, but again: We do this by making Churchill seem gullible and any-means-necessary, like, if in real life he'd had a TARDIS or a Dalek he would have used it. Which -- again, taking into account my lack of historical knowledge -- seems a bridge too far, considering neither of those things exist and anyway, it's us Americans that proved we can't be trusted with our toys.



Let's head up the apples and pears to meet Professor Edwin Bracewell, head of Project Ironside and pretty much a complete cipher -- even less interesting or meaningful than Winston himself -- and let him stutter a whole lot. Amy gawks at the airplanes in the sky and does her best Donna Noble impression, and then Churchill and Bracewell proudly fire off some kind of space lasers, dropping Krauts out of the air, and there's much hip-hip and cheerio to be had, old chum, and the Doctor's weirded out because he's starting to realize that Churchill really will use absolutely anything at his disposal, including alien tech that none of them realize is alien.

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The Doctor gets very aggro and finally they wheel out an olive drab Dalek -- which is pretty sexy in its own right -- who tells the Doctor *I am your soldier!* The Doctor tells it, essentially, to STFU and stop fooling: "Stop this. Stop now! You know who I am, you always know." (Technically true -- Oncoming Storm and all that -- but really only here, in these words, to justify the absolutely absurd scene coming up.)

Bracewell explains that the creature is "one of [his] Ironsides," and puts the thing through its paces: "You will help the Allied cause in any way that you can?" Yes. "Until the Germans have been utterly smashed? Yes. "And what is your ultimate aim?" *To win the war!* Well, now I'm convinced. The first one's a little ropery but the other two are so totally Dalek.

Which is what the Doctor is trying to explain to them! But they are not having it! They are not Daleks, what does that word even mean? Ironsides! "Blueprints, statistics, field-tests, photographs. He invented them!" The Doctor screeches about it some more, and they tell him the whole story, about how this "genius" appeared out of nowhere with detailed plans to build hostile alien machines and everybody was so impressed. (Amy's mostly impressed with how the guy's Scottish, but I'm not qualified to respond to that. The only Scottish geniuses I know are dyslexic alcoholics with a weird predilection for surfing and stroking ladies' hair with or without their consent.) What I'm confused by is firstly, why did you even call the Doctor (still, yes) if you're going to listen to him flip out and then look at this sketchy as fuck story where the mad scientist showed up with sentient killing machines out of the blue, and not put those facts together?

This is also bothering the Doctor, needless to say. It's rare, but not as rare as it should be, when the Doctor gets to himself complain about how stupid the script is. But when he tries to explain that the Dalek are both alien and hostile, Harkonnen's like, "Exactly! They will win me the War!" (Cut to awesome propaganda poster of a Dalek rampant.)

The Doctor asks a very Excellent Question -- "Why call me in if you won't listen to me?" -- and Winston gives, I must admit, a proper answer: That when he called the Doctor a month ago, he was worried because they seemed too good to be true. So it does make sense, this little bit. I must have missed that line over all the screaming, before. The Doctor tries to describe exactly what a hundred or thousand Daleks might do to the world, and enlists Amy, but for some reason she doesn't remember the thirty times the Daleks have invaded Earth. Even the one time, not so long ago, when [Adelaide was a little girl](#), that [Amy was totally alive for](#).

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He's worried by that, but not as much as by the central plot, such as it is. Amy heads over to knock one of them on the dome, and one of my favorite little things of this season happens: He calls her first Amy, and then Amelia. He only calls her Amelia when he's scared; I like it. "Can I be of assistance?" She ignores him, chuckling in her short little skirt, and asks the Ironside if it's

a dangerous alien. "I am your soldier!" it says, in that beautiful voice. She pushes further, but it runs away to perform its duties.

The Doctor takes away Harkonnen's cigar, and their little matching bowties wobble around, and Churchill gives a speech while the Doctor climbs winsomely all over his body: "We are waging total war, Doctor! Day after day, the Luftwaffe pound this great city like an iron fist. Men, women and children slaughtered, families torn apart." Sir Christopher Wren's churches, all in flame. "I weep for my country! I weep for my empire! It is breaking my heart." And maybe there's a bit of gravitas, a bit of something in there that we can recognize. The Doctor tries to give him a pep talk about how the whole world knows Churchill is resisting, how he's a beacon of hope in the darkness of the Blitz, but he's faltering. "But for how long? Millions of innocent lives will be saved if I use these Ironsides now!"

Which I *would* say is a callback, to the Time War and to the questions asked him by both the Master, in Donna's Lost Year, and by Davros the next time, and even answered by the Master last New Year's, but this is a different show now. I think he just means what he says on the tin, and it has nothing to do with the Doctor at all: He wants Daleks, and TARDISes, and anything else, because he's afraid. They are Weapons of Mass Destruction, maybe; or maybe Mutually Assured Destruction. Lord knows what the point is, this time. There are thematic callbacks here to the Sontaran/Genny three-part story, even -- whether the Children of Time or the Doctor's Daughters ever have an endpoint higher than weaponization -- but even that just seems emblematic of the fact that every episode this season seems to put a premium on episodes Moffat previously wrote, as far as what goes in the Almighty Conceptual Smoothie Blender along with every movie ever made. But like I said: Early days. Can't tell what's on purpose and what's just a tic. Hopes are not, as yet, particularly high.

"Just listen! The Daleks have no conscience. No mercy. No pity. They are my oldest and deadliest enemy. You cannot trust them!" That's why they rule, not that they've been particularly awesome in a long time, but thanks for reminding us *just how*, once again, *the stakes truly are*. "If Hitler invaded hell," Winston states for about the fifth time, "I would give a favorable reference to the Devil! These machines will be our salvation!" The all-clear is sounded, and the Doctor broods while everybody rushes around.

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"What does hate look like?" he asks Amy, when she comforts him. The fuck answer can you give to that question? Looks like this episode. Looks like the GOP feasting on Teabaggers' ignorance. Looks like Katy Perry. What on earth are you asking me? "It looks like a Dalek. And I'm going to prove it."

In the nearly empty lab of Dr. Bracewell, the Daleks are bringing him tea. The Doctor shows up, telling him how great the Ironsides are, and Amy makes an impenetrable but I'm sure hilarious joke -- "Not bad for a Paisley boy!" -- that makes them friends for later. The Doctor asks where the idea came from, and he spins some kind of rot about "the muse of invention" and that, which is to be expected, because he's sort of a John Smith, this Dr. Bracewell. "You get a lot of these clever notions, do you?" He does. He "teems" with them, in fact. Hypersonic flight, gravity bubbles [note] that could sustain life outside the atmosphere, and the like. The Doctor asks whose ideas they are, knowing the answer in his hearts of hearts, and Bracewell assures him they're "entirely under [his] control," even as he thanks them for his tea.

I love this episode for a few reasons, even as much as I hate it, but you can watch it again with your Dalek Suit on, once you're done, and -- as usual -- be impressed with how far the Dalek are willing to go. "The perfect servant, and the perfect warrior," Bracewell says, fairly patting it on

its head. (Wrong, but precisely why I love the Sontarans a bit more than I'll ever love the Dalek. Only slightly. They're like priests of violence, where the Daleks are rage and violence itself.)

The Doctor assures Bracewell that they won't honor their promises to him, tipping his hand as far as not trusting the professor, which is sort of awesome considering the [CyberKing](#), and how easily this episode could fall into the same pattern. And why wouldn't it? The Doctor has no way of knowing just how low they're willing to go this time; how willing they are to place their hands below Bracewell's foot. To admit they'd willingly subjugate themselves says a fair amount about the Doctor himself, wouldn't it? And he can't do that. He needs Doctor/Dalek, we've seen it every time since [the first time](#). If they can't stick to the script -- what happens when you draw the line from mercy to justice and on into the dark places -- then he can't define himself against them. Like Donna, or the Master, or 10.5: He needs somebody else to tell him who he is.

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...My, my. I may have just fallen in love with this episode. Or least Story A. Their shame is no shame, because they are so single-minded they'll do what's necessary: Martha, kneeling before Saxon. The Doctor in his birdcage, too. That Good Wolf, the Aslan routine, has always been his: To let humanity lift him up when he had to. And seeing the Daleks do it, he knows must be a perversion, because it's not a real letting-go: It's something ugly, that preys upon their fear. That would see the greatest men of all the Blitz laid low, just to further their agenda. Maybe he's not so paranoid after all: Maybe shame and taint like that are timelocked too.

Ridiculous situation, descending into heavy-handed drama, for the illusion of story. Check: "Call them what you like, the Daleks are death!" They talk about how yes, that's true, but only insofar as they are death to our enemies, and the forces of darkness, and the Third Reich, and tile scum, and whatever else. It offers him tea again, and he screams at it some more, and they're like, "We just want to win the war!" Okay, now we're getting somewhere. "This war? Against the Nazis? Or your war? The war against the rest of the Universe? The war against all life-forms that are not Dalek?" It doesn't get it, and nobody else understands why he's being so weird. "You do not require tea?" it screams, in that voice, and he goes full-on.

The Doctor bashes the thing again and again, and yells at it to fight back, and everybody's freaking out, and there's spit flying all around, boom boom boom. "What are you waiting for? You hate me. You want to kill me. Well, go on! Kill me. Kill me!" It begs him to stop, promising it's only his soldier. "You are my enemy! And I am yours! You are everything I despise! The worst thing in all creation. I've defeated you time and time again, I've defeated you. I sent you back into the Void! I saved the whole of reality from you! I am the Doctor! And you are the Daleks!"

Everything changes. "Correct. Review testimony." It plays his words back, and suddenly he gets very confused. His rage is replaced by fear. And up on the ship, the Dalek rejoice. "Receiving testimony now. *I am the Doctor! And you are the Daleks!* Progenitor activated. Testimony accepted! Testimony accepted! Testimony accepted!"

Okay, so essentially they were counting on the fact that his ongoing hate and fear -- deserved or not; which although that erases every story we've seen about them, when they were constantly showing they could be more, do more, think better, still does make sense -- would give them what they wanted. He defines himself against them, and thus defines them. He creates evil, or is the messenger/tool that allows evil to create itself. Very high-level, if treated in the most primary-color simplicity imaginable, but still smart. Which makes it suck worse that this is when the story really starts to get dumb.

Bracewell argues with them, that he created them out of his own genius, and they demonstrate quite graphically that he is wrong: A laser to the hand reveals his own alien technology inner workings. He is their android, sent to bring them into existence so that they could maneuver the Doctor into saying this one specific thing. Dicey, contingent, but makes sense in the larger emotional-philosophical context. But unless you're not getting it, let's spend awhile making it explicit. "I wanted to know what they wanted, what their plan was. I was their plan!"

"Commencing Phase Two. The Progenitor is activated! It begins! Testimony accepted!" They tell him not to beat himself up for falling into their trap, but he's weirded out. And do they chase them now, Amy wants to know? Is that what we do now? No, he says, it's what *he* does now. "I've got to stay safe... Down here? In the middle of the London Blitz?" and he nods, rubber-faced: "Safe as it gets, around me."

Left alone, Churchill is droll in explaining what they do now: "KBO, of course." Keep bugging on! They stare around for a bit, and then somebody notices a UFO in the sky. Amy knows he's up there, "right in the middle of everything," but can't figure out how that helps to know. Up on the roof, the watchmen yells about the Blackout, so we'll remember it for later.

The TARDIS jumps onto the ship, and he says hello and asks for tea; they rush to Exterminate but he says he's got the old girl set to self-destruct. When in doubt, like Winston far below, sacrifice the angels first. (Although, as we'll learn later, it's not actually a self-destruct: It's a cookie meant for tea. Cute, cute in the same way as Ten being brought back to himself by a cuppa.) He looks around, noting how trashed and tired things look up there, and reminds us -- sort of -- how we last left the Daleks. I can't even remember, really. There was the God one, that was Rose, and then there was the time with the... No, that was the Toclafane. After the God one, there was that ridiculous story where they evolved into the things with cat-penises on their head, right? Good Lord. Effing Tallulah and the genetic spirit of humanity and whatever.

Okay, wait. Maybe something here. Let me think; what happened to everybody. The Cult of Skaro was: Caan who went crazy/awesome, Sec who turned into Diagoras and was also awesome, the boring one that built the lightning rod, and the baby one, Jast. They all died in that dumb episode except for Caan, who went into the Time War and got Davros, and in so doing became an Abomination like Rose: Where she touched the whole of everything and became light, destroying her body, he saw *everyone*, the truth of war, and became shattered, like the Master (or Lazarus). Caan became beautiful and twisted, the only Dalek who ever laughed. He brought back only glimpses, like the written woman of Gallifrey.

Caan eventually sided with Sec, and was working behind the scenes all through Donna's year to bring everybody down. So these are just the weakest, palest children of the Cult of Skaro: The overly xeroxed grandchildren of Davros. That whole parallel Davros set up -- with the Children of Time on one side and Skaro's warriors on the other -- is what broke down when Donna died. So if just one remove away from Davros leads to this kind of miscegenation and self-doubt... No wonder Torchwood is so shitty at what they do! Jack Harkness is the Doctor's Caan! These guys are the *Dalek Torchwood*!

That's hilarious. Anyway. Somewhere in there the Dalek and Cybusmen had their little face-off, which would have been Torchwood, and Yvonne. Right? The Void. So then maybe came the cat-penises, and at some point there was Dalek Caan, who was like the most awesome, most wasted thing of all time; possibly involved in the above. And then they stole the planets, which

is the thing Amy can't remember and the thing Adelaide couldn't forget. That's when Caan said all the crazy things, and Donna took care of it that time somehow, and they all piloted the TARDIS, which was cool. But who was left at that point, Dalek-wise? She was talking really fast and I don't remember what she did with them.

"One ship survived." Oh, well then. Okay. So they fell back through time, crippled and dying... and they "picked up a trace." One of their Progenitor devices, which is "our past... and our future" -- "That is deep for a Dalek," the Doctor says, which I guess is true but not exactly deep for anybody else -- and so the deal is that this Progenitor device contains pure Dalek DNA: "Thousands were created, all were lost. Save one."

It's that word "pure" that kills me, here, because of where and when we are. The only thing good about that was how black Dalek Sec became Diagonas, and turned the hatred of the other Daleks against themselves. His lack of "purity" was the point of grace that scared the rest of the Cult of Skaro shitless, and they abandoned the experiment. But here, in the middle of WWII? Don't talk to me about "purity," please. How fucking gross.

The Doctor asks why they created Bracewell if they had the Progenitor, and then based on zero information from when he asked the question a second ago, he's able to answer it. But not without a lot of self-congratulation and content-free whoops and hollers about how amazing he is -- which translates into the writer telling us, directly, how amazing this episode is. Which is something, apparently, every scene in this season requires. To its credit, though, the music is *simply gorgeous* in this scene, not manipulative at all.

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"The Progenitor wouldn't recognize you, would it? It saw you as impure! The DNA is unrecognizable as Dalek!" Got it. So we have that whole recursive thing that Moffat loves so much, and I do too, wherein basically machines have to prove to another machine that they're the same machine, but have to do it by tricking, by information. So the Doctor's testimony, which they pried out of him through dodgy story-logic, was that they are, in fact, Dalek. The Progenitor defines them against the Doctor, same as he does.

They start doing shit, freaking him out. "Withdraw now, Doctor, or the city dies in flames!" And how? They turn on every light in London: "Watch as the humans destroy themselves!" Of all the borrowed halo of this show, its shallow references to the Blitz, I have to say that part scared the shit out of me. You get certain images lodged in your brain, and the blackout is a biggie. Terrifying, honestly. Just a light flicking on.

The War Room goes shit-nuts, of course, and everybody runs around, and the PM chomps his cigar, and much worrying happens, and the German squads are coming, and Amy won't sit still for that, and Churchill has once again lost his pep, and then all of a sudden Amy does her best to act like she's organically coming up with an idea, but she's such a good actor and the lines are so incredibly dense and silly that it just ends up annoying. She talks in ellipses, with an absurd look of self-satisfaction, but doesn't actually say anything, because that's how this episode works. Like a rat hitting the pleasure button over and over and over, having forgotten the simple beauty of *using your words* to tell a story in any other mode than neener-neener. "Oh! Staring us in the face! A gift! From the Daleks!"

The Doctor yells at the Dalek... This room in their ship is marvelous, by the way: all shiny chrome and a sense of hugeness, while shining floor. You could make a screensaver of the shots in this beautiful room. These Daleks are gorgeous, the thing that's about to happen is phenomenally good-looking even if it's totally trashy, and the place it all takes place is fucking

brilliant. When I say I hate everything but Matt and Karen, I should say, "And the set dressers and art designers and other practical/below-the-lines, because they are kick-ass." (And weirdly, *always* totally smoking hot; I've noticed that for years. Not necessarily the case, here in the US.)

So he yells at them to turn off the lights of London, and threatens them some more, and they're like: "Boom. Stalemate. Get lost, we're done with you." The Doctor hisses and spits and explicitly explains the title of the episode, although we don't know that yet: "Oh, that's it? That's your great victory? You leave?" Yes. You're the only one having this fight. "Extinction is not an option. We shall return to our own time and begin again." He throws a literal screaming fit at them about this, basically ordering them to not do what they've just said they're going to do, and already they have him at an impasse: If they leave, London will already be safe. But he's stuck in the story.

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"Observe, Doctor, a new Dalek paradigm! The Progenitor has fulfilled our new destiny. Behold! The restoration of the Daleks! The resurrection of the master race!"

(Again: Not here, not now. Tacky. It was tacky when the Master said it, just because it was a pun beneath us all, but most especially retarded and tacky here, because... What? It means nothing. The best you can get out of this parallel is that Dalek = Nazi, which has always been the case, is not an argument that needs making, and has been constructed in such a way that it actually violates Godwin's: "No wonder the Doctor's so steamed! That whole scenery-chewing Tennant-level meltdown makes total sense and wasn't just empty drama to give the illusion of story! Because you know who wouldn't yell at them and priss about like that? *HITLER!*")

So while they're doing this shit, the Progenitor has been working hard to create shiny new beautiful Daleks, candy-colored as only a laptop right off the presses could be. They roll out one by one: A shining White Dalek named Tommy. A shining Blue Dalek named Billy! (My favorite Mighty Morphin' Power Dalek!) A shining Yellow, Orange and Red Dalek! Trini, Kat and Rocky! That sound you just heard is two billion previous Dalek toys going in the trash, even Black Dalek Sec, as the NEW PARADIGM crashes down around us all.

Because the world ending all around them isn't annoying enough, Bracewell has decided to kill himself. Luckily, Churchill and Amy come running down there into his lab, thanks to her out-of-the-blue decision-making a second ago. "My life is a lie, and I choose to end it," he says, with the free-floating gravitas you've got to employ when your character is a cardboard cutout of a human being who hasn't even vomited up his precious, wet backstory for us yet.

Amy tells him to cut it the fuck out and help them, so he whines at length about how A) He made the Daleks, B) His life is, aforementioned, a lie, and C) He has all these memories about this and that, how he was in the war and loved a lassie and *gas gas quick boys an ecstasy of fumbling* and a bunch of the usual substandard Wilfred Owen shit we toss around when we need backstory in a hurry. Have you seen "[Human Nature/Family Of Blood](#)"? Hope so, because you have to do this one yourself and it might give you some pointers, just like "[Empty Child/Doctor Dances](#)" gives you the necessary information -- the proper Spirit of the Blitz emotional state, Nancy and her brother/son, the Mouse that Roared, the things that make us great, the healing of Albion, all that bullshit we don't apparently need to experience this time round -- for the episode itself.

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(And I'm barely being facetious, because honestly this episode, like the last, relies so much more on previous connections you've made in your brain -- movies you've seen, episodes of this show, trite scenarios they scarcely have to built to at all for you to assume the connection for yourself -- that frankly it would be better if you had that stuff available to call on. Be Pound's Ideal Reader, and take the references -- which is all these two episodes are, just fragments of better ideas and half-remembered tales by better writers, shored up against the ruins of story -- that they're practically literary in their own right. Almost poetry. To the point that maybe I should treat them that way, like sketchy semiotic moments in a web of universal poetics, referencing lyrically instead of earning in their own right. What do you think?)

"What you are, sir, is either on our side or theirs," says brilliant Winston. "Now, I don't give a damn if you're a machine, Bracewell -- are you a man?" Amy gets in his face -- in lieu of a personality this episode, she'll be saying *real talk* and *using women's intuition to get to the mealy-melty heart of the matter*, while gazing adoringly at Churchill as he does nothing -- and says she gets it. She understands, she says, she really does.

(Which was a tossed-off line in this episode, but more and more increasingly looks like the lynchpin of Amy's story. As much as I wanted to believe that kissogram=stripper was just a kneejerk reaction from fake Jezebel feminists, it seems to be more and more true as the story goes on, in Moffat-world: Women are mysterious and lovely objects, machines containing obscure mechanics "we" can't hope to understand, and their daddy issues run deep. We have to save them from becoming stone, or robots like Bracewell here, because they can't do it for themselves. God help me, but I'd prefer Russell's gay-agenda pedestal over Moffat's stereotyped stripper-pole any day of the week, because at least in that formulation women are an ideal we're approaching, instead of strange broken creatures from Venus that we must resist. It starts here.)

Having shown compassion for Bracewell's "am I real or am I a stripper" crisis, Amy moves on: "Look, there is a spaceship up there lighting up London like a Christmas tree. Thousands of people will die tonight if we don't stop it, and you're the only one who can help take it down." Why? Because he's alien tech. "You're as clever as the Daleks are. So start thinking!" (Screaming repeatedly at someone about their potential magically activates their potential? Check.) They imagine immediately gravity bubbles and hypersonic flight, and suddenly London is capable of flying Vipers! Sexy old dogfighters gifted with the technology to become weapons of space war every bit as exciting as... When Bernard Cribbins flew one a few episodes ago. Well, in for a Skywalker in for a pound, I say. They get them ready, with much dashin' about.

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"All hail the new Daleks!" the Mighty Morphers exclaim, and then suddenly the old drab-and-khaki Ironside Daleks line up to be exterminated. "Yes, you are inferior! Cleanse the unclean! Total obliteration! Disintegrate!" They shove the old "unclean" Daleks into ovens, and we giggle about it -- "Blimey! What do you do to the ones who mess up?" the Doctor asks -- and everybody has a good laugh. Over the streets of the London Blitz, while millions of real live people are actually dying down there for something that clearly we can see is so silly! And campy! The Master Race! Ha-ha, silly Dalek Nazis, exterminating the lower races like they do.

For real, that's what happens at this point. And it's not even anti-Semitic, it's just retarded. You know what we don't joke about during WWII? There's like *one fucking thing*.

"You are the Doctor! You must be exterminated!" they yell, when they're done Final Solutioning those silly, campy, *this show's just for kids* Jew Daleks. And he's all sonic in the face, like, "Don't mess with me, sweetheart!"

(Okay. That part was pretty awesome, that one line. I love it when he calls people "dear" or "sweetheart," because there's always a little glimmer in his eye.) So more of this running round in the War Room, and the War Room finally tunes into what's up on the ship, with the Doctor just appalled by everything, and the Daleks do something that almost makes the New Paradigm cool: "Scientist! Strategist! Drone! Eternal! And The Supreme!" That would be the Supreme White Dalek, explaining the others in order: Orange Scientist, Blue Strategist, Red Drone, and the Yellow Eternal -- with black buttons, rather than silver. The Doctor congratulates Supreme on his paintjob -- "I'd be feeling pretty swish if I looked like you!" -- because white is best, in this story, and gets to speak. How novel. Also, their voices are deeper and way less awesome. They just sound mean, instead of mean and crazy like they used to.

Downstairs, everybody's running about and mad as hatters, and old guv and that, but they release -- pardon, "scramble" -- the fun action sequence and we get to watch archaic airplanes fight in space. For a good long time. And don't get me wrong -- that's pretty awesome -- but it doesn't do much for the story besides stretch it out with eye-candy, and that goes in your eyeballs, whereas what we do here goes in your eyes but really your ears, if you see what I'm saying. Like how it's hard to talk about *American Idol* in words because they're singing. So just assume that goes on for quite a long time. Not as long, though, I'll say, as the unending Vinovocci space battle did.

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The Doctor sexily says that blowing his own ass to kingdom come is just an occupational hazard, and then they see the dogfighters coming in, and scream about various things as they've been designated previously. "Danny Boy" radios over and over to the Doctor, and he screams how Winston is "a beauty" and they have a big old space fight with some total *Star Wars* music, and it goes on and on and on. "Tally ho!" they say, and their planes are named things like "Jubilee," and it's like a theme park about Han Solo was crushed into the side of a theme park about empty fake memories of British culture, somehow tectonically, and they just shrugged and made it work because it doesn't matter where the money's coming from.

Space battle space battle space battle. Cheering cheering cheering. The roof watchmen literally puffs out his cheeks and goes, "Do your worst, Adolf!"

The Doctor makes one of those classic speeches designed to make us think any of this shit matters -- "This is the end for you. The final end! You've just played your last card!" -- until such time as they notify him of the newest and most stupidest story that's about to happen: "Bracewell is a bomb!" they scream. He goes on and on about how bluffing and deception are in their shiny natures, and there's even a shitty pun: "There isn't a sincere bone in your body. There isn't a *bone* in your body!" But of course, he's wrong, because Bracewell runs off an "Oblivion Continuum," okay, which: What is that? Well I'll tell you, it's a captured wormhole that provides perpetual power, meaning that when boring old pointless Bracewell detonates, *the Earth will bleed through into another dimension!*

The point of addicts -- drug, gambling, even sexual -- is that they go chasing that first high, when everything matters and everything's alive with significance. Have you ever seen *Owning Mahoney*? There's this great point where the shrink asks him how he would rate the thrill of gambling -- 100 -- versus the thrill he ever got from anything else, which barely hits 20. And the point is that 20 is where you're supposed to be: Only acting like an addict raised the ceiling and burnt your brain out to the point where 100 was even possible.

Even bringing the fucking Daleks out for a spin is touching on 100 territory, but eventually you have to raise the stakes: Bring in the Cybusmen or steal a bunch of planets and where are the

bees and all that shit. So rebirthing the Daleks is so pedestrian at this point -- because the enemy, and the toys, must always exist -- that now you've got to raise the stakes personally for the Doctor *so terribly high* that we've got dimensional bleed. Why not "If we blow up Bracewell the Nazis will win?" No, skip that entirely and go back to the entire point of the first three seasons of this show like it's nothing.

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And it's not even about the Daleks, here: It's that *if the Doctor euthanizes this STARWHALE! for no reason whatsoever*, then the unavoidable consequence is that he can *never call himself the Doctor again!* NEVER! Never mind that he's done worse, extincted the Rachnoss and did something truly horrible and nightmarish to the Family of Blood and murdered his entire race, no. *That's just how high the stakes are this week.* You can tell by the music. And the only reason this is anemic and manipulative and queer is that even when it's happening you know that we'll *never mention it again.*

When these shiny iDaleks reappear, they'll be like, "Got your nose!" and all of this whining and screaming about how THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT YOU GUYS will all fade away, because it's not. And that's lame, but really what's lame is that it *doesn't need to be*. This could have been a neat story, but once again it's THE MOST BIGGEST THING THAT EVER OH MY GOD. And there is zero reason for that, narrative or character or otherwise. It's a tic, meant simply to bring a tear to the eye and keep us tuning in. Of all the Moffat tics, that's the one that disgusts me the most, because it's seriously not necessary.

Craft a compelling story or don't, tell-don't-show if you feel like it, but stop shoving down our throats that this has never happened and will never happen again and thus we are privy to *history being made*, and just focus on telling an honest-to-God story. Master that. Because either way, we'll tune in. Because we're not stupid, firstly, and secondly we would do anyhow, because we're capable of believing. The Doctor taught us that. Stop being prolefeed, and start *feeding us something*. British people are supposed to be smarter than this, or else what's the point of us pretentious Americans gulping down every single thing you think or say? Case in point:

"No! This is my best chance ever! The last of the Daleks! I can rid the Universe of you, once and for all!" The Daleks talk him through it -- "fucking dare you," essentially -- and he pisses and moans and whines and barks and rolls over and plays dead and screams, and he's all, "If I let you go, you'll be stronger than ever. A new race of Daleks!" Forever, this happens, with the choice being explained and then reiterated once again, over and over: "Then choose, Doctor! Destroy the Daleks or save the Earth. Begin countdown of Oblivion Continuum! Choose, Doctor! Choose! Choose!" That's literally what they say.

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The Doctor tells Danny Boy to withdraw, and lets them go. If you don't get it, here's some more fuckin' help: "The Doctor has failed! His compassion is his greatest weakness!" Whatever, we get it. And you can't even say that this part is for kids, because what's actually being discussed in these retarded terms is still too complicated, no matter how stupidly you say it, for those children you hate so much to really even grasp. Point being, finally and boringly: The Daleks have won. Victory of the Daleks. Gotcha. Made up circumstance with literally a million backdoors and possibilities, shoehorned by a hundred underutilized concepts and set-pieces and merchandising opportunities into resolving down to one issue, which could easily have been avoided, and now cornholes us into one of the stupidest fucking things I've ever seen, because at this point it really is the only choice left, given the story logic we've got so far.

"Professor. You're a bomb! An inconceivably massive Dalek bomb." He doesn't get it. "There's an Oblivion Continuum inside you!" Cue the bleeding multiverse and wormholes, et cetera. The Dalek take off, triumphant, as we discuss this. They check out the bomb inside him and talk at length about how he is the bomb and the bomb is him, so there's no disconnecting him, and Amy stupidly goes, "There's a blue wire or something you have to cut, isn't there? There's always a blue wire. Or a red one." Thanks for fucking helping, Amy. She complains about how he talked on and on about the War and all his memories and whatever, and the Doctor sort of explains: "Someone else's stolen thoughts, implanted in a positronic brain!"

Solution: Remember this other dead dude's life. Remember it *so fucking hard* that he stops being a bomb detonated by remote. He talks a bunch of random details about the real Bracewell's life, post offices and abbeys and ash trees of various number, and it goes for awhile, but like: His chest is a brassy steampunk breastplate with a huge counter on it, slowly counting down. Nobody ever noticed, until today, when the Doctor ripped open his shirt. Just didn't think about it, I guess. How did he feel, you may be asking yourself, when his parents died? I know I was wondering that. Well, I'll tell you: It hurt. This other person, man, it hurt him so much! When somebody's parents died that time.

The Doctor gives a seriously irritating made-up science speech that goes on for a hundred years, literally *willing this plotpoint into existence out of nowhere*, about how when the scarlet fever got Edwin's parents, it hurt I'm telling you, "worse than a wound," seriously that's what he says, and the Doctor is all, "Remember it now, Edwin! The ash trees! By the Post Office! And your mum! And dad! And losing them! And men in the trenches you saw die! Remember it! Feel it! Because you're human! You're not like them! You are not like the Daleks!"

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On what gaywad planet is this possibly true? "Brilliant! Embrace it! That means you're alive! They cannot explode that bomb! You're a human being! You are flesh and blood! They cannot explode that bomb! Believe it! You are Professor Edwin Bracewell! And you, my friend, are a human being!"

To this bullshit's credit, it doesn't work. But only because the great and powerful God of Heteronormativity -- whereby everybody who talks to each other is *oooo-oooo-oooo* dating and any woman who expresses any kind of power must be your *henpecking wife* and any woman who wears a skirt above the knee is a *dirty whore* -- is here to giggle and point and make sure everybody knows getting married and falling in luuuuuuuuuuuuv is as good as it gets, so Amy's like, "You were in love with somebody! Like I'm flirting with being in love with the Doctor, who I knew when I was a little girl, which is totally gross! What was her name? Boys like girls or they don't mean anything at all! *What was her name?*"

Her name was Dorabella, of course. Even the Doctor thinks that's lame. And what was this Dorabella, whom somebody else loved but is now the key to this entire story, like Mario's Princess always in another castle? I cannot wait to care. I'm sure it'll be really inventive. Major bonus points if he brings in the color of her eyes, this Dorabella, because that's never happened before.

"Such a smile. And her eyes... Her eyes were so blue... Almost violet. Like the last touch of sunset on the edge of the world... Dorabella..."

Bingo bonus! And you know what? It works. "Welcome to the human race," the Doctor says, and "Whew!" says the pointless cardboard cutout of Winston Churchill, and "Heck yeah" says whoever's still watching this crap, and the Daleks are all, "You will never defeat us, Doctor! We

will return!" As if we had a doubt. And the Doctor, even though we've now had this conversation three times and we already know this, goes into a fucking tailspin about "No, no, no! They can't! They can't have got away from me again!" Bracewell assures him that they're gone, and Amy's like, "What's your damage?" His damage is that we need to get some more fucking blood out of this stone. That's all. No other reason.

"I had a choice. And they knew I'd choose the Earth. The Daleks have won. They beat me. They've won."

Got it. Dunzo. You literally cannot make that clearer at this point. So then Churchill literally hands him a cigar, and Amy and the PM makes grin-faces at each other for the completely pointless, bloodless, emotionless time they spent with the two-dimensional representations of each other that filled up this nonsense episode, and Winnie's like, "I still have a war to run, Miss Pond" and some guy runs up and says a bunch of shit about St. Paul's and Piccadilly Circus and Old Bailey and whatever else, and that random lady from earlier in the episode bursts into tears out of nowhere and Churchill explains also out of nowhere that it's because her boyfriend died -- See, wars have casualties! So meaningful! -- and then we still have one or three more godawful cutesy scenes to go.

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The Doctor takes out Bracewell's alien tech, and Churchill whines about not being able to use the space-planes because that's all he cares about, literally spouting earlier dialogue verbatim -- "Those Spitfires would win me the war in 24 hours!" -- and there's a smug little tutorial from the Doctor about how Winston's not allowed to win the war just yet because history is history and it's all very important and why would anybody want to end WWII early, and yet another in a long line of condescending, pointless pep talks -- "Winston... It's gonna be tough. There are terrible days to come. The darkest days. But you can do it. You know you can! The world doesn't need me, the world's got Winston Spencer Churchill!" -- and yeah, it's been a right pleasure.

Churchill steals the TARDIS key and scrappy trashy old Amy yells and gets it back and Harkonnen woggles at her -- "Sharp as a pin! Almost as sharp as me!" -- making a tragically condescending situation all the more unpleasant, and then somebody yells "KBO!" one more time because gay sex is hilarious, and then we go talk to Bracewell about how he assumes that the Doctor is going to kill him, due to him being a dangerous stupid robot, but the Doctor and Amy do an unending routine about how they'll be back to get him in ten, fifteen, twenty, thirty minutes, and he doesn't get it because it's too dumb to get, and finally they're like, "GO PRETEND TO BE A HUMAN BEING BECAUSE YOU ARE INHABITING THE FLESH OF A DEAD MAN GO SO FUCK DORABELLA IN THE GUISE OF SOMEONE ELSE," hahaha, so romantic and so idiotic, and seriously that's as bad as it's going to get for awhile. I promise you.

Amy's like, "We all have enemies, yes, but mine's the woman outside Budgens with the mental Jack Russell. You've got, like, you know, *arch*-enemies." So she thought it would be all "running through time, being daft and fixing stuff," but apparently there's danger. Unlike last week, when there were fifty fucking things flying at her face including monks and tentacles and vomit and creepy robot-dolls and memory wipes and genocide and Room 101 and the life-threatening dorkiness of Liz 10. Or the week before *that*, when she literally prayed the Doctor into existence because she was alone and terrified throughout her *entire life* and got all tied up with a monster that lived in her house that she didn't even know about that crawled around in the bodies of coma patients and eventually incurred the wrath of giant flying eyeballs, no. Now it's for *real*.

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"Is that a problem?" he asks, and she points out she's still standing there. "You're worried about the Daleks." He says a true thing: "I'm always worried about the Daleks." But on top of that, why doesn't she remember them in the first place? Why are there no Daleks in the dalekpond? Why the cracks everywhere? Why? WHY?

Interesting, and high hopes. But as a sort of follow-up to last week before never speaking of that again... I've gotten a lot of well-meaning instruction over the last few weeks as to what exactly my job is, and how I could be doing it better. But I think some of this arises from a misconception of what my job is. What I -- and we, at this site -- have always said is that a recap is a subjective experience of the episode. Nothing more and nothing less. There are infinite ways to convey that. You can hate the thing you love or hate the thing you hate, you can snark or you can involve Tennyson, but retelling the story through a personal lens is the only thing a recap means.

So whatever it means to you, this bullshit I talk -- about good writing is *this* or bad writing is like *this* or even "this is how fans sometimes show their loyalty to something they love" -- is only in service of that. Once the recap is over, it's over. Once the subjective experience of the episode is over, it's done. No grudges, because as much as consumer fandom thinks everything can be laid at the door of a [showrunner](#) or [particular exec producer](#), that's *not how TV works*. Showrunners set the agenda and guide the process, but the individual episodes are written by human beings. And that can be good, and that can be bad, but what we need to remember is that it is *never simple*. And as part of my job, that's become part of the way I work.

So yeah, not great, and fell apart toward the end, but still miles away better than last week, and next week is actually pretty amazing. After that, we'll see. Point being: Every episode is its own thing. Don't ever be disappointed by expecting something else and don't ever look for excellence that's not there because you love something: Just open up to the thing that is, and hope for the best. There's always going to be next week.

And in that vein, quickly, I want to talk about a particular word. That word is *kitsch*, and we all think we know what it means, but we don't really know what it means, because like any word in German it means specifically what it means and nothing else. We use it to describe a host of English ideas, but that dilutes the meaning. The best expression of the German meaning of the word *kitsch*, I think, is from the Czech writer Milan Kundera:

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*"Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch."*

If you're inclined to have a mission statement, which I am not, you could scarcely do better than adhere to this statement, and heed its warning at all costs. In the recaps, that might be the only critical thing I've ever said, about any show or entertainment, through a million different lenses.

Now, my unironic love -- pathological need -- for that second tear runs through everything, from [the Yearly Rant](#), to my obsessive love of [Lee Adama](#) and [Josiah Bartlet](#), to the [Soldiers of the One](#) and *Kick-Ass*. The possibility of beauty. And what I think I react so strongly to -- *always*, not just in these past two episodes, but throughout RTD's run, and episodes of every other show I've ever watched or recapped -- is the sometimes gaping difference between the two.

What I personally saw last week, and just a smidge less this week, is the second tear, rolling down a cheek, all by itself. It doesn't follow the first, it's just painted on the cheek itself, with



Hollywood magic, by someone who honestly cares about us, and wants to make us feel deeply. It is done with love, and with pride of accomplishment. But it's not art. And it's that tear, and that tear alone, that pisses me off, because it is unearned. And it could be, so easily. And I think we -- you and I -- deserve better. And I think probably we'll get it, but in the meaning waiting sucks, and Waiting Is.

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It's a beautiful sunny day, birds tweeting calmly under a bright sky, and a soldier wandering a sunny field, lost. He's got a kiss-mark near his lips, and he's whirling around in the beautiful day, but soon enough he's approached by gunmen and an awesome guy in a tuxedo. He's wearing hallucinogenic lipstick on his face, which the tux guy knows means "She's here." Does this meadow really exist? Because there's a forest on the *Byzantium*, but he could also have created the whole thing. This bears remembering.

I was going to watch "Blink" and the Library episodes, to get ready for this one, but I ran out of time but mostly out of the inclination to do so. And, since from what I do remember this episode doesn't seem to give a damn about "Blink" either, that's probably for the best. Tuxedo man looks nervous, and then there are feet in really high heels, and a lady in a Blair Waldorf dress takes out a tiny revolver that shoots lasers, opens up a vault, and attends the shiny blackbox inside. She sets her gun, not quite a squareness gun, to a new setting, and begins to solder the box.

Twelve thousand years later, the Doctor is dragging Amy through a museum, the Delirium Archive, getting anorak about how wrong they've gotten so much of the history of every single artifact. It's directed strangely, in that he barely seems to be looking at anything in order to say his lines -- "Wrong! Wrong! Bit right, mostly wrong. Wrong! Very wrong! Oooh, one of mine. Also one of mine..." -- and move on to the next blocked area. The Archive -- "final resting place of the Headless Monks, the biggest museum ever" -- is a fairly gorgeous cathedral.

Amy, complaining that they were supposed to visit an alien planet next, realizes that museums are how the Doctor keeps score. It makes sense: Less like video game *levels*, more like video game accomplishments. There's something to the idea of comparing the Doctor to a museum, because it's where things go to die whereas it's enough for him to know he's touched them. He lights upon the blackbox, twelve thousand years rusted and dusty, and stares down. Amy's none too impressed. It has letters on the surface. Somewhere the woman is blasting away; the Doctor explains it's a Homebox, from "one of the old starliners," but in this case it's interesting because what the woman is right now writing, twelve thousand years ago, is Old Gallifreyan.

"There were days -- there were many days -- these words could burn stars and raise up empires, and topple Gods." This time is no different, considering who and what. And what do these old letters say? *Hello, Sweetie!*

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Yeah, it's River Song. She takes off her glasses and winks at the camera, even as the Doctor is stealing the Homebox away from the Archive. I like the actress, so the smugness doesn't bother me. And of course, given their Mel Bush history together, you have to look at everything she's said before when she shows up again: In her lifetime they've visited the Bone Meadows and Asgard, for a picnic, and the "wreck of the *Byzantium*," which is what this story is about. We're in the middle of the story, since he's met her and she's met him, two beginnings, and we know when she dies, which is the ending. So we know that's not today. We know when Tuxedo says, "Party's over, Doctor Song," that it's not really over.

The Doctor plugs the Homebox into an old TARDIS screen, and they watch River get cornered. She explains to Tuxedo that she needed to see what was in the Starliner's vault. "Do you all know what's down there? Any of you? Because I'll tell you something. This ship won't reach its destination." Tuxedo orders her death, and she grins up into the cameras again. "7775/349x10-0-12/acorn. Oh, and I could do with an air corridor." And if you're listening then you already know how friggin' awesome it's about to get.

River tells Tuxedo he might want to grab onto something -- "like I said on the dance floor," the little minx -- and then blasts her way off the Starliner, and into space, blowing a kiss, arms thrown wide like the Green Fairy. That is bad-ass. None of this "Basically, I rule" shit: Just a blown kiss and a blown airlock, and then before you know it she's danced across the firmament, and into his arms.

They give chase to the *Byzantium*, and within seconds she's started that River Song shit, teaching the Doctor how to drive the TARDIS better than he ever could. "Use the stabilizers. The blue switches!" He swears they don't do anything, and she applies them; the TARDIS evens out immediately. The Doctor pretends this is a hindrance, that he likes it when things are bumpy: "Yeah, well, it's just boring now, isn't it? They're boringers. They're blue *boringers*." (Remind me to pay attention to whether he keeps using them -- it would be excellent if he did from now on, but I always forget to listen to the TARDIS; even the Cloister Bell has to be pointed out to me.)

River Song immediately does six impossible things with the TARDIS, locking onto the ship they're following and parking the TARDIS alongside. "Parked us? We haven't landed!" They have. "It didn't make the noise!" What noise? River explains that it's not supposed to make the noise, that he just drives with the brakes on. He digs his heels in: "Yeah, well, it's a brilliant noise. I love that noise."

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He tries to assume control of the situation, which in this particular brand of Moffat Gender Studies is always a terrible idea, and River starts popping off facts from the TARDIS screen she's tamed, but of course he knows better because he can smell all the facts just from opening the TARDIS door, so that puts her in her place. Amy asks why she can even fly the old girl, and River assures her she learned from the best. "Shame you were busy that day," she snorts, and the well-chuffed Doctor is once again well-chastened.

See? This is *totally* how men and women relate to each other. All husbands and all wives are exactly like this, all the time -- and all men and women must eventually be husbands and wives respectively, because what's to be done without heternormativity? Imagine for a moment that the "Gay Agenda" were the norm: Wouldn't this look like an Agenda of its own? Putting the boy spoons with the boy spoons and the girl spoons with the girl spoons, and so on.

Would "Fireplace" have been half so meaningful to boys, without that tacked-on, narratively meaningless coda wherein the two men of Reinette come together to mourn her, despite her husband never having appeared onstage before she was dead? I say no. I say we're at a point now where maybe we need things explained to us in very basic language, because the longtime unassailable economy of men and women is so shaky right now. We need hearty jokes, on the level of *Dilbert* or *Ziggy*, about what men do and what women do. Very British, from Thackeray down to *Benny Hill*. Certainly relevant to our experience, which is the keystone of lazy humor. *Everybody Loves Raymond* for the D&D set.

Which is so brilliant if you're a man, because when you're a man, you're not actually accountable for anything, because no matter how wrong you are, or how often, you're still right. Women are

wrong even when they're right, which mean bumbling Homer Simpsons like our Doctor get to have their cake and eat it too, while we can all rest easy knowing even kind and brilliant women are hiding dark secrets that undercut their viability and make them less. Even the most desirable of women is still lacking in ethical sense -- no matter how often it may seem otherwise, just long enough to make the Doctor the butt of a silly joke -- and will eventually be laid low. Thank God.

And I mean, like I said before: RTD's putting women on pedestals is only marginally less grody. But at least his women were *people*, rather than obscure mechanisms that nobody really understands. But then, Moffat's preaching to the choir, isn't he.

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Upshot, Amy and River manage to make subtle friends even as the story's mostly only interested in them as two connections to the Doctor. He and Doctor Song get right to it, working out the crash of the *Byzantium* in near-code, but when River steps out of the TARDIS he shuts the door behind her and gets ready to leave again. Amy goes all Dalek: "*Explain!* Who is that? And how did she do that museum thing?"

He answers, honestly, that it's both a long story and one he mostly doesn't know. The thought shakes him. Good, she should shake him. She's one of the most interesting things about this iteration of the franchise, but that's downplayed by the fact that she's so blasé about everything. Amy asks if he's running away -- cute Scottish "running awee" -- and he quite honestly says yes: "Because she's my future." Amy asks if we can run from that, and he's cute. "I can run away from anything I like! Time is not the boss of me."

But per their discussion twelve thousand years hence, Amy's been A) Promised a planet, which this is, and B) Loves the idea of River, because from what she can tell River is to the Doctor as the Doctor is to Amy: Something that moves around him in space and time, terrifying and disappointing and enlivening and thrilling, all at once. So she demands they stay. He agrees to exactly five minutes: "I'm telling you now, that woman is not dragging me into anything!" Which -- even if we weren't aware that most stories are 44 minutes long and this one will be 84:13 in total -- would still be laughable, because of course she is. She pulls him forward.

"What caused it to crash? Not me," says River, something she's already considered as a matter of course, and he checks out the damage: As the Homebox has it, the Starliner's warp engines "had a phase-shift." Everybody's dead. Man, I wanted to know what a Starliner was and what the Tuxedo guy was doing and why that meadow was so beautiful, if it was just a recreation area on a cargo ship or what. Guess I forgot what show I was watching.

...Well, maybe not. This is a pretty good episode, and even if they are bad, bad episodes can exist in service to something greater -- it's just that they don't need to be bad to do so. The thing is that Moffat has so many obvious tics it's hard to differentiate them from actual motifs: What he's doing on purpose, and what he's doing because he can't help himself. And I've no illusions that RTD was the same, it's just that he and I happen to share the same obsessions and language. But to go off that idea, maybe it's best to just focus on what actually turns me on about these stories, which is how the Long Game happened in the first place.

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The Archive is sort of like the Library, the biggest Thing of its class, and in both cases it's a collection of history: The Doctor is that too. Amy joins Reinette and River in the group of women (Maiden, Mother, Crone?) whose lives twist around the Doctor's in this out-of-joint way,

and vice versa. (Add Sally Sparrow to that, come to think of it.) "Leaving the Library," sharing a house with Prisoner Zero, FORGET/PROTEST/ABDICATE: They're all much like that hallucinogenic meadow, which is to say they are all much like the Matrix, and bring into question the ultimate nature of reality itself.

*Mme. de Pompadour*, CAL -- even the Winder/Smiler/Liz parts of *Starship UK*, which is to say the majority of the *Starship UK* -- were essentially women who were also machines and didn't know it. Who had gotten lost inside the dream. And then there's the Crack, "two places in space and time that never should have touched," which -- in these stories, people are always also places -- will almost certainly prove the answer to the question, whatever the question may be. It occurs to me, and somebody said this eloquently enough on the forums that I can put it into words now, that the Doctor's encounter with Amelia has already itself broken the cycle of this show: The Companion is lifted by the Doctor to unimaginable heights, usually, and then dropped back into the slow path forevermore. And that will fuck you up. But to do that to a child?

The Doctor is even now, maybe without yet realizing it, doing penance for what he accidentally did to Amelia. And as personally troubled as I am by the evidence and the way it is expressed, I cannot say it's not a valid story. In therapy they tell you that people are like butterflies: Open the chrysalis too soon, out of weakness or childish cruelty or because somebody once did it to you, and nothing good can come out. Add to that Moffat's take on men and women, and the whole stripper/kissogram thing turns into something new and different and altogether awful. But not, sad to say, entirely unfamiliar.

The Doctor's always tread a line somewhere between father and friend to the human race -- to lie in the bed with us, like Martha, without touching -- and only the Master was until now capable of perverting the difference. But by accident of TARDIS and regeneration, on the day he lost his entire family for at least the third time? Maybe Amy's wedding is the first wedding on this wedding-centric show -- Clement Donna, Library Donna, Doctor-Donna, post-Doctor Donna; Rose and Ten Point Five; Mickey and Martha; Peter and Jackie and Peter; the Doctor and River; River's posthumous tampon commercial in the Library -- that *absolutely must take place*, to set right the Crack. In repentance for Rose and Martha and Donna, and the things the Doctor did to them; to make psychological what *Sandman* and RTD made mythic.

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Who knows, but that's what I'm feeling right now. What else... Always pay attention to what they're wearing. I cannot stress this enough. If you're watching a TV show that you've never seen before, and have used up your questions about WTF is going on, you can still learn about 80% of what you need to know just from what the people are wearing. It's a conceit left over from the theatre days, but it's also a huge part of what is working on you when you're watching television. Anybody wearing the same color is on the same team, anybody wearing contrasting colors is not. Light is good or authoritative, dark is questionable. I cannot, again, stress this enough: Always pay attention to what they're wearing. Start practicing this week. You're going to need it.

So if it was a phase-shift, it was sabotage. A complex plan, carried out over who knows how long, by the very patient. The building it crashed into was a temple, unoccupied for centuries, of the two-headed Aplan indigenous to this planet, Alfava Metraxis. Due to spoilers, Dr. Song learns she'll be a Professor by the time we meet her, but not that she'll die on that day. She gets her first real grin out of him, with her knowing thrill about learning even a little. He relaxes, a bit. Amy's still confused about the timey-wimeyness of the trick she pulled, and Song grins: "Two things always guaranteed to show up in a museum. The Homebox of a Category IV Starliner, and sooner or later: Him. It's how he keeps score."

They grin and get to giggling about his ways, so he gets testy again. (This is totally how women and men behave, with their storied intuition and their clucking; their blustery inability to ask directions, their fear of purchasing tampons at the store. It's uncanny!) "I'm nobody's taxi service! I'm not gonna be there to catch you every time you feel like jumping out of a spaceship." River figures out there's one thing left, a survivor in the belly of the ship. He gets scared, and Amy watches him. They are condescending about him some more, and River gets on the phone to some heretofore unknown folks.

"You lot in orbit yet? Yeah, I saw it land. I'm at the crash site. Try and hone in on my signal..." She calls to the Doctor for a sonic assist, the better to call them down. "Ooh, Doctor! You sonicked her!" giggles Amy, still entranced by this idea of man and God somehow touching; explicitly sexualizing what has always been implicit. Waiting for her fellows, River takes out her diary -- which is both TARDIS and a Journal of Impossible Things -- and asks if they've done the Bone Meadows yet. The Doctor tells Amy to stay the fuck away from the book, "her" diary, and River grins: "*Our* diary." I think this is when Amy figures out who they are, what they are to each other. "Her past, my future... Time travel."

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Father Octavian, Bishop Second Class, touches down with a squad of twenty clerics. Hallelujah! The only thing, the only version of men I love more than soldiers, is priests, which is why I love the Sontarans just a little more than the Daleks, who are both. It's not a fetish thing, it's the opposite of a fetish thing (more likely a Triple Aries-Double Libra-Capricorn Rising thing, not that I believe in that shit), but I'll ask you: *Who doesn't love a nun with a gun?*

Octavian was promised, if not an army, the equivalent of an army, which is the Doctor. He is immediately impressed to meet him; Octavian's eyes light up when he sees him for what he is. Apparently River's been helping the Church with a "covert investigation" into the Weeping Angels. They need essentially to get onto the *Byzantium* and neutralize its Angel. They can't climb in from above, because of the warp drive issue, so they have to go through the huge cliffside Temple it landed in and on. The catacombs are still burning.

Inside, Octavian keeps calling him "sir" and he keeps not noticing: "Catacombs, probably dark ones. Dark catacombs, great." Apparently, they are specifically called the Maze of the Dead, which sounds just cheery enough that it puts the Doctor's teeth on edge. Amy notices the "sir" thing, and I guess because she watches this show somehow knows that he never lets them do that, which is a clunky way of reminding us that he never lets them do that. "So whatever a Weeping Angel is, it's really bad, yeah?" He notices she's still there, and gets pissy with her about it. "Ooh, are you all Mr. Grumpy Face today?" Sometimes flippant *is* the way to play it, but I'd love it if Amy had any other tool in her toolbox.

"A Weeping Angel, Amy, is the deadliest, most powerful, most malevolent lifeform evolution has ever produced, and one is trapped inside that wreckage. And I'm supposed to climb in with a screwdriver and a torch, and assuming I survive the radiation -- and the whole ship doesn't blow up in my face -- do something clever which I haven't thought of yet. That's my day. That's what I'm up to. Any questions?" Just one: Does every fucking episode need this exact same speech? We get it, the stakes are high. "Is River Song your wife?" He sighs and looks away, but she's loving it: "Because she's someone from your future, and the way she talks to you, I've never seen anyone do that. She's kinda like, you know, *Heel, boy!* She's Mrs. Doctor from the future, isn't she? Is she gonna be your wife one day?" He admits it, and she's shocked. "You're right. I am definitely Mr. Grumpy Face today." River calls his name, and he's hangdog for a moment. They head into one of the Church barracks, I think, as the Doctor explains Octavian: "He's their Bishop, they're his clerics. It's the 51st Century, the Church has moved on."



River's rigged up a film loop from the cameras inside the vault, four seconds, which the Doctor identifies as an Angel, "hands covering its face," which he only says as a clunky way of telling us to watch its hands and its face. He recalls the time with Sally, but notes that in that case they were "scavengers, barely surviving." (Also, they were cool and interesting and didn't move when we the viewer were looking at them, and they killed you by sending you back through time instead of just being super mean. The regular ones we're meeting today have very little in common with them.)

We run through the whole thing about the Angels, River being sweet with Amy as she asks Excellent Questions about how they're not really "just" statues unless you're looking at them, and we learn that this particular one on the video loop is a dormant collector's item, pulled from the ruins of Razbahan at the end of the last century. "There's a difference between dormant and patient," the Doctor says scarily, and then explains the central plot hole in this story: "It's a quantum lock. In the sight of any living creature, the Angels literally cease to exist. They're just stone."

Which is not exactly true, because when they move, which this is very stupid, they are still just moving statues. So anything you think is scary about them, no longer scary. And the only reason they're here at all, in a story that manages to strip out all the least interesting bits of the Vashta Nerada and present them as something new, is because somebody bought Moffat a drink or something and gave him props on the Weeping Angels, and instead of thinking about what was actually cool about that story, decided that the Weeping Angels -- and no doubt the merchandising opportunities they present -- were themselves what made "Blink" cool. Which, it's one thing to misunderstand what works in somebody else's story, and twist it, but how fucked up is it that you could take your own awesome story and stripmine it like you'd never even seen it before?

But then the Doctor says this is "the ultimate defense mechanism," and it's Amy that says, "What, being a stone?" Which I can't help but think works on two levels, since that's what she did. (Echoes of Jackie's "we get hard," in the Elton episode, which was it turned out less about getting blowjobs from concrete and more about what happens when you lose Bliss in pursuit of the Doctor. Elton is an Amelia that never became an Amy; he was saved from that fate or became something worse, depending on your point of view.) "Until you turn your back," he nods.

Problem one: Since the hyperdrive split on impact, the whole thing is racked with radiation and "gravity storms." Deadly to everybody but Angels, who love that sort of thing. Quick Excellent rundown of the indigenous two-headed Aplans, who died out 400 years ago, and then 200 years later, humans terraformed and built up their numbers to six billion. What part of this information is necessary? None, and given what happens later actually it runs counter to the plot, but at least it's an excuse for yet another "You lot, you're everywhere! Like rabbits! I'll never get done saving you!" joke, because those go over so well.

The Doctor tells the Bishop to lock and load, he calls out to his Verger about the explosives -- which is just brilliant, of all the different clerical words they use here, because of what a verger does -- and Bishop Octavian summons River Song in turn, but she calls out, "Two minutes! Sweetie, I need you!" The Doctor follows her, and Amy feels left out. She heads inside the communications room with the Angel video, and it's taken its hands from its face; it's beginning to turn toward her.

"I found this. Definitive work on the Angels. Well, the only one. Written by a madman, it's barely readable, but I've marked a few passages..." The Doctor recognizes it, I guess -- "Didn't you hate his girlfriend?" -- and smells it like he does lately, as Amy asks Song about whether there was another clip. She heads back inside to see the Angel standing, arms tossed out and getting closer in every loop, while the Doctor complains that there's something wrong with the book.

"Oh, it's so strange when you go all baby-face. How early is this for you?" Very. He doesn't know what she's about yet. "How do you know who I am? I don't always look the same." She's got pictures, all his faces. "You never show up in the right order though. I need the Spotter's Guide..." He's distracted by what she said, so sweetly: There aren't any pictures in the madman's book. While Amy yells at the Angel, that it shouldn't be moving and the usual, and tries to turn it off -- and once again we see her, framed and staring out at us -- and the Angel gets closer, fascinating her on the screen, and finds that she is locked inside, and the Angel bares its teeth, outside the barracks the Doctor and the Doctor remember something you'd think would be just a bit more memorable. Everybody gets stupid.

"What does that mean, 'An image of an Angel becomes itself an Angel?'" After a few seconds, they figure out what should have been immediately obvious but took them just the few seconds necessary to make something exciting happen to Amy, they try to crack back into the barracks. Amy winks first one eye and then the other, desperately trying not to blink per the folklore, as they scream at each other through the walls. It comes out of the screen at her, at us, and for some reason it has locked River and the Doctor out, and Amy gets very nervous about what it's going to do to her, and she locks eyes with the Angel... Just in time for the Doctor to tell us a whole new rule about the Angels that we never knew before, and contradicts actual shit that has happened on this show: "Amy, not the eyes. Look anywhere but don't look at the eyes! 'The eyes are not the windows of the soul, they are the doors. Beware what may enter there.'"

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I mean, if these are the rules then there is literally no point to any of this. Keep reading that madman's book and you might end up yelling, "Hum quietly the theme to *A Summer Place* and it will bake you some biscuits! Do it, Amy!" And she could be like "I don't know that song!" And he could hum forcefully at the door. "Amy, turn yourself around like the hokey-pokey, but don't look into its eyes, but don't look away, as you step toward it backwards *with an air of regret!* You will meld with the Angel and it will become a robot body that will give you unimaginable power!" Or "Close your eyes, but don't close your eyes, and dance a foxtrot with the memory of blindness, while giving the illusion of confidence! Or you will surely die!" (You think I'm exaggerating, but that's almost exactly what is going to happen next week.)

But there was never an abruptly forced crisis on this show that can't be easily solved after a few minutes of heart-pounding entertainment, so Amy finally goes for awesome and pauses the video, counting out until the very split-second blip during which the loop starts over. That's fairly clever, I like it. It's almost more annoying when the moments are so brilliant, because it's so dodgy on either side. The Doctor and River enter the chamber, where Amy is very proud of herself for figuring it out; River Song combats every natural condescending bone in her body as she tries to praise Amy for her brilliance without it coming off patronizing.

The Doctor runs over to fiddle with the something or another and he's like, "River, hug Amy. I'm busy." No reason, just him being a dick. What has happened is that the Angel is sending out little visual projections of itself to check out how things are working; using communications as its fingerholds. Which is a great idea, but is just more unrelated new facts heaped on a killer concept, diluting it into story. "It's no longer dormant. It's gone positive!" he yells, which I don't

even know what that's supposed to mean, and then River and the Doctor run off to see what the Bishop's accomplished outside.

Amy feels an itching in her eyeball and immediately reports to the Doctor: "Doctor, remember when you said not to look in the eyes? I had actually just done that when you said it, and now I'm feeling a strange itching in my eye. I'm not saying it's related, but since I did the exact thing you told me not to do -- while interacting with a creature whose sole property before this episode had to do with quantum observation -- I'm risking foolishness by making sure you're aware. I wouldn't want it to develop into yet another huge fucking problem that ends up taking five seconds to solve."

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Just kidding! She stares into space and thinks nothing of it and is stupid for no reason. Thank God these people are such great actors, or I would be really offended by all this bullcorn. Like I might *never* stop bitching.

Okay, they're ready to go into the Catacombs. Do we have a gravity globe? We sure do. What is a gravity globe? Ask me next week. They head into the Mortarium, the Maze of the Dead. What's that? Doesn't matter, unless you're hunting statue monsters, and then it's super scary, because there's statues everywhere. Do you get what I'm saying? I better say it again: "A stone Angel on the loose amongst stone statues." Still haven't caught up? "A needle in a haystack," River mutters, which causes the Doctor to say these words: "A needle that looks like hay. A hay-like needle. Of death. A hay-alike needle of death in a haystack of, er, statues... No, yours was fine." Zany, this. (Should I feel vindicated or horrified that Terry Pratchett thinks this show is as stupid as I do? The enemy of my enemy and so forth.) So they gotta look for the statue, that's task number one, but there is no task number two. What then? How to fight it? "We find it, and hope."

Interesting. Time for a stage-whispered aside regarding The Truth About River Song, between Octavian and herself. "He doesn't know yet, does he? Who and what you are." And if he figures it out, he says, the Doctor won't help at all. "I won't let you down. Believe you me, I have no intention of going back to prison." Hmm.

They spread out through the Maze of the Dead, and a great whopping lot of sand comes pouring out of Amy's eyeball, so she's like, "You guys? Sand is coming out of my previously itchy eyeball. I'm sorry I didn't mention it earlier, but at this point I'm fairly certain that this is a big deal, because great whopping lots of sand have never come flowing out of my eyeball before. Might this have something to do with the stone creatures we're hunting, that I looked in the eye -- with this eye right here, the one with the sand coming out of it -- before you could warn me not to?"

Just kidding. She asks more Questions. River cutely explains to Amy: "Oh, it's not as bad as it sounds. It's just a labyrinth with dead people buried in the walls... Okay, that was fairly bad." Fairly funny. She gives Amy a stab with a "virostabilizer," against the coming radiation superstorm, and it's interesting how she does it: "This won't hurt a bit," she says, and a moment later: "There, you see? I lied." Of all the things River Song has never done to harm us, I think that's the thing she did that made me like her best. "There, you see? I lied." Just brilliant.

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Amy asks what he'll become, and River's all nervous like, "Oh, the Doctor's the Doctor," and Amy gets sassy about it, and River turns to the Doctor: "Yes, we are. Talking about you." He

prissily pretends to be busy, but they seem to be getting his goat in a very Sarah Jane/Rose kind of way, and she tells him to turn his instrument back right side up. It's nice, in its way. Amy accuses River of being his wife, and through her protestations -- "Do you really think it could be anything that simple?" -- Amy's like, "Duh, yes." And then River likes her back. Which is to say, River for the tenth time in as many minutes tells Amy how special and amazing she is.

They stare up at the catacombs, and it's totally awesome looking. Meanwhile, some expendable soldiers talk about the good times, like when they fought lava snakes, and then one of them vanishes and then starts talking through the walkie-talkie, which is clearly a sign -- if the conveniently malfunctioning flashlights weren't a clue -- that his ass is already dead. Sent backward through time? Nope. Something banal. Also, their names are "Angelo" and "Christian." I mean, give me a fucking break please. It's not like there's a deeper level of meaning here.

Were I asked, back in the day, I would say that you have priests, and you have soldiers, hunting angels whose power lies in unmoving stone images, and that what this tells us is that religion is a war. And before you started yelling, I would say that "religion" and "war" are both words some of us tend to hear pejoratively but that in fact, considered on the merits of the words themselves, there's no reason to get offended on behalf of either. The Church changes, we're told. Religion, faith, is a living breathing thing that dies in the moment of its orthodoxy. A wave that never breaks, until you try to stop it moving.

The Weeping Angels are images of faith, not faith itself; like grace, or the Doctor, their true power lies in the second you're not looking for them. What each of the Companions eventually figure out is that the Doctor, God, gives you everything you need to be truly magnificent, at which point clamoring to stay with him is just a refusal to wean from the teat. Clinging to stone and turning hard yourself, thinking that there's one answer to every problem and the target stops moving. The Soldier-Priests are hunting down this lie, and not the truth: Weeping Angels are everything bad about religion, and this Church is everything good about war.

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And even if I didn't think the show thought that, I would know the story *meant* it. But we're not writing apologetics anymore, we're not trying to synthesize or tease out anything deeper, and so I will say that in a story about angels and priests that look like neither, it's still *super stupid* to name your soldier-priest sons Angelo or Christian.

The voice leads the other one astray, while elsewhere a soldier takes aim at a statue, summoning Octavian and the Doctor's team to him. "We know what the Angel looks like. Is that the Angel? According to the Doctor, we are facing an enemy of unknowable power and infinite evil. So it would be good, it would be very good, if we could all remain calm in the presence of decor." The Doctor asks the boy's name, which is Bob, which the Doctor loves. "It's a Sacred Name. We all have Sacred Names, they're given to us in the service of the Church." The Doctor, finally irritating Octavian with his flagrant disregard for authority -- the priesthood and the military, implicit in this one man, being about the most authority you can get -- laughs and tries to charm the boy: "Sacred Bob. More like Scared Bob now, eh?"

(Um, more like Evangelista, actually.)

"Scared keeps you fast," the Doctor says, stepping in on Octavian again. "Anyone in this room who isn't scared is a moron." I hate the way he acts around soldiers, I always have. Poor Martha got it between the teeth every single time, and not even Davros calling him out for it seems to have made the point. The Bishop -- who's not entirely unsympathetic, either to Bob's twitching

or the Doctor's soft touch -- sends the boy Bob to guard with "Christian" and "Angelo," and we get on with it.

Amy worries about the *Byzantium*, high over their heads, but are assured that the Aplans are great builders. "Had dinner with their chief architect once," the Doctor explains, noting for our later delight that they were two-headed, and then randomly asks River to read him the end of the madman's book: "What if we had ideas that could think for themselves? What if one day our dreams no longer needed us? When these things occur and are held to be true, the time will be upon us. The Time of Angels."

...Okay, I forgot that part. Maybe this episode is actually happening, under all the freakouts and borrowed images and plotlines. Maybe that's what the Angels were about all along. We get hard. But I'm so used to thinking only in theological terms with this show that maybe I've fallen to my own orthodoxy and what would for me be the central line of this episode could better be applied to Amy's lot. She's hard. She worshipped him in ways she didn't even know, building her toys and fancies and raggedy dreams. Maybe the story has kept on going, with so many moving parts I couldn't be sure. And so many reasons not to trust it:

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"Hey, Angelo? Christian? Where are you?" Bob walks headlong into bullshit. Even that name, Evangelista, links her back to this story, doesn't it? That's weird, obviously not on purpose, but funny that years later we'd revisit this particular story architecture with a xeroxed Evangelista character sewn in, when just by her name she could have been a member of this squad.

"The maze is on six levels," it's explained as they work their way upwards, "Representing the ascent of the soul. Only two levels to go." The Doctor offers to take Amy to visit the Aplans in their prime, and for some reason she forgets they are time travelers. "I thought they were all dead?" He says he bowls with Virginia Woolf, too, and then either makes a weird joke about her ("Very relaxed, sort of cheerful") or goes back to talking about the Aplan: "That's having two heads. You're never short of a snog with an extra head!" While River starts to figure out something is dreadfully the matter, and the Doctor agrees, he continues to hector Octavian: "Then they had laws against self-marrying and what was that about? But that's the Church for ya!" Octavian bristles, as the Doctor meant him to do, and they keep searching, and Amy sort of apologizes for him: "Church had a point, if you think about it. The divorces must have been messy..."

River and the Doctor get real annoying at this point, making encoded exclamations and patting each other on the back for having figured it out, without actually saying what they've figured out, until everybody is annoyed. See, the Aplan had two heads, but all the statues have one head -- maybe they didn't notice because of yet another "perception filter," or maybe just because the plot often requires that intelligent people act like total buffoons. So essentially, without explaining a goddamn thing as he twist-twist-twist ratchets up the tension of the scene, the Doctor gears everybody up to total hysterics while apologizing for, still without explaining, the trap into which he has led them. Then he makes everybody turn off their flashlights, which wigs everybody out, and turns his back on. And guess what? All the one-headed statues in the entire cavern have gotten closer. Got it? No? "Clerics, keep watching them. Every statue in this maze, every single one, is a Weeping Angel." And they are being hunted.

So, whatever their aim, here's the score at halftime: A Weeping Angel has lain dormant for some amount of decades, knowing that at some point the people collecting it would get close enough to this one planet that it could phase-shift their dork drives or whatever, bringing the ship crashing down onto a maze of statues that also happened to be some very bummed-out and

weak-feeling Weeping Angels, at which point the Angels would feast on the radiation of that ship and recharge to do more mean stuff? No, I can almost buy that, actually; everything else that happens is the Doctor and River messing with their plan, and dragging Amy along. An eternal creature could surely wait it out, if not apply some kind of mojo we might not even know about, to get that accomplished. Carry on.

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The voices call Bob to come see something, and he's very nervous, and it takes a good long time, and it's fairly hair-raising, and they keep going, "Come and see this! Come and see!" You knew something fucked up was going to happen to him the second the Doctor took time out to patronize him. No, scratch that: The second you saw how pretty he was.

So maybe the Aplans died out 400 years ago because the Angels got to them, at which point they moved into the Catacombs and took the form of their statues or something. They look like regular statues and not Classic Weepings, and are moving dreadfully slowly and not super-fast like usual, because "They're dying. Losing their form. They've been here for centuries, starving. Losing their image. And their image is their power. Power. Power!" Why are you screaming? Oh, because he just figured out that they're in the middle of a waking, hungry army of orthodox images, dead religion. That's scary. Mushfaced near-dead ideas that don't need us anymore. The Bish calls for Bob and Angelo and Christian and whatever, because the rest of the twenty are with the team, and Bob's voice evangelistas over the walkie: "I know, sir. Angelo and Christian are dead, sir. The statues killed them, sir." And he is heading back up to us.

"Well done, Bob. Scared keeps you fast, told you. Your friends, Bob, what did the Angel do to them?" Snapped their necks. Everybody discusses that that is weird, because of the time-displacement thing they usually do, but apparently they probably "needed the bodies for something." Octavian and the Doctor fuss for a second before Bob explains that he did not escape them. "The Angel killed me, too. Snapped my neck, sir. Wasn't as painless as I expected, but it was pretty quick, so that was something."

And then -- as in I'd say half of the episodes of this show -- we realize the voice of the innocent person we barely met is actually the voice of the monster. "You're not talking to me, sir. The Angel has no voice. It stripped my cerebral cortex and reanimated a version of my consciousness to communicate with you. Sorry about the confusion." Which means the Bob that is approaching them -- the dataghost, as we'd say of the Vashta Nerada -- is the Angels getting closer. Which they already were. Everybody screams and runs about in the caves, flashlights joggling all over the place, and the Doctor apologizes to Octavian for bitching at him but, he points out, the guys were already dead anyway. "I know that, sir. And when you've flown away in your little blue box, I'll explain that to their families."

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Just a little nasty driveby; just a little reminder of what the Doctor does. Maybe it's meaningful, maybe not. Still don't know about all these little recycled moments. I mean, if asked, I would say that this is an indictment of the idea of the Doctor himself, by the strong hands of those armies and congregations that labor in his service: That the difference between gods and men is that gods don't die, and they can leave whenever they want, so fucking leave already: *What if we had ideas that could think for themselves? What if one day our dreams no longer needed us?* Then you're in a Gnostic nightmare, from which the only escape is smashing every statue in the maze.



"Angel Bob, which Angel am I talking to? The one from the ship?" Yeah, the only one that's working. The one that is behind them, that used to be above them. Well, good: Better to escape along the route they were already rocking. But what's this? Amy's having a huge problem? Why yes, it's about that time by the clock on the wall. And what is this problem? I hope she doesn't have sand coming out of her eyeball! No, that's over: Now her hand is made of stone, she's gone hard, stuck to part of the passage. Worrisome. She's sort of freaking out about it, honestly. "You looked into the eyes of an Angel, didn't you?" She apologizes, and he explains several times that the thing is messing with her head, from inside her head. Another thing they can do, apparently.

So she shivers and dithers and he tells her it's all in her mind, and that goes on for awhile, and he's like, "The Angel is gonna come and it's gonna turn this light off, and then there's nothing I can do to stop it," which is really not helping, and "We're both going to die," which is *really* not helping, and she's like, "Go on without me!" Because she is a brave soul and because she knows, per River's diary, that he's got a lot of things left to deal with, and he explains yet again that time can be rewritten, and it's like we're watching the last three episodes in slow succession, and he goes, "Keep your eyes on it. Don't blink." Which, just say that fifty more times please, even when it doesn't make sense.

Amy's like, "You can't die for me! I'm not that clingy! Go save the people!" and the whole time he's like, "You are not turning to stone!" I mean, they yell about this for a seriously long time, and the music is like CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS SHIT, and he tells her she's "magnificent" and they have a tearful goodbye sort of scene, and then he bites her on the hand, which causes her to jerk back, because... She is not turning to stone, there is no sand in her itchy eyeball, and the whole last scene was just a fantasy, which the Doctor cured by the power of *wishing*, much like when Amy went into that instant coma and he yelled at her to remember the Alamo or whatever. That maybe faith is the thing that helps you ignore what you think is reality in order to make the jump to something better, perhaps. That good faith is the ability to jump out of bad faith, to keep moving just long enough to save yourself from turning to stone.

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"Blimey, your teeth! Have you got *space teeth*?" Everything has a silver lining. That whole random reiteration of the trip down SPACEWHALE's gullet was worth "space teeth." I give.

Squad's down to four men, torches flickering and dying, gravity globe whatsit also imperiled -- oh, I get it, they're feeding on the power of all the stuff, not just the warp drives -- and they run and they run and they run and get cornered. *Byzantium*'s still too high up and apparently one of the sixteen dead soldiers was carrying the equipment. "There's no way up, no way back, no way out," we're informed, and we discuss how the Doctor always has a plan, and he worries how there's no way out because there's always a way out.

And right before he figures it out, Angel Bob speaks up. "Doctor? Can I speak to the Doctor, please? Your power will not last much longer, and the Angels will be with you shortly. Sorry, sir... There's something the Angels are very keen you should know before the end: I died in fear. You told me my fear would keep me alive but I died afraid, in pain and alone. You made me trust you, and when it mattered, you let me down."

It doesn't make sense; it doesn't have to, except for the last four words. River gets it -- "They're trying to make him angry" -- but she can't stop it working. "I'm sorry, sir. The Angels were very keen for you to know that." The Doctor answers their mean-spirited, ugly little unseating speech with one of his own: "Well then, the Angels have made their second mistake because I'm not going to let that pass. I'm sorry you're dead, Bob, but I swear to whatever is left of you, they will

be sorrier... Yeah. I'm trapped. Speaking of traps, this trap has got a great big mistake in it. A great big, whopping mistake!"

He turns to the left, and the right, and they all offer him their trust. Their faith. "Always," grins his wife. Octavian offers the Doctor his gun, without hesitation. "I'm about to do something incredibly stupid and dangerous. When I do, jump." He hops, by way of example, but you can see it from here. "There's one thing you never put in a trap, if you're smart," he tells Bob. "If you value your continued existence, if you have any plans about seeing tomorrow, there is one thing you never, ever put in a trap." *And what would that be?*

The Doctor takes aims at the gravity globe, high above the cavern floor, just under the belly of the *Byzantium*, and shoots it apart with a soldier-priest's gun, but we already know the answer. If you're trapped in the Maze with the Devil, at least you know who the bad guy is. The bad guy is the one who trapped you there, the one who's so hungry He can't help turning you to stone. That's how all stories start, and only a soldier-priest could know how much that really means, and so when the Doctor shoots the sky, they do it without asking: They jump.

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Luckily the Doctor did not blow up the *Byzantium* last week: He blew up the gravity globe, which sent gravity spilling everywhere, so when they jumped up they actually jumped down, and now they are upside down, the enemy's gate is down, and they are dancing on the ceiling. Let's talk about it for a long, long time. River gets it, army guys never get anything and also in this case are big shitty fake CGI, Amy for some reason doesn't get it -- "Doctor, what am I looking at? Explain!" which earns her a literal "Oh, come on. Amy, think!" -- and then acts dipshitty some more as he tries to usher them all into a corridor which has its own fake gravity, perpendicular to their current upside down gravity. The whole cast pitches in at this point to explain to Amy what should be immediately apparent, not to mention it doesn't really matter if Amy understands the finer -- or I mean, totally obvious -- qualities of artificial gravity, because those Angels down there are looking more and more like actual Angels all the time.

But really it's because A) We don't trust the audience to understand things, even though we really should and B) We see no problem using Amy as a stand-in for the hypothetical audience's hypothetical retardedness, which is a separate issue but also an obnoxious problem. When you're shoving every single idea you've had into every single episode, and somebody says it's confusing enough that you have to treat one or more characters like they've had a head injury... Well, you get this episode. Which is a rollicking adventure, or rather a serial set of meaningless mini-games, that lasts for an hour and signifies nothing. Which is still more fun than watching River and Donna swan about in the gauzy Lady Fantasy of the Library for an hour, I'll grant you, but is just as much of a letdown coming off the first half. But whereas earlier irritating episodes were impossible to summarize, this one is fairly easy, because nothing actually happens.

The Angels or something closes the team -- River, Doctor, Amy, Octavian, a soldier -- in the immediate corridor, open the outside door, and then come closer, closer, closer. If you still think they're scary, I guess they're scary. The lights start going off and on, the gravity might fail, it's all hugely important. So ramped up is the scale and scope at this point that it actually becomes self-parody: "There's no way to override [whatever]! It's impossible!" River says, and the Doctor says, "How impossible?" and River says, "Two minutes." Which is like everything embarrassing about Moffat happening at once.

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"Clerics, keep watching them. And don't look at their eyes. Anywhere else. Not the eyes." They turn off the lights so they can get the door open, and say hoary old shitty clichéd things like, "We're being attacked by statues in a crashed ship, there isn't a manual for this!" and Octavian and River revisit for the third time whether she trusts the Doctor. "I absolutely trust him," she says, and Father Octavian goes, "He's not some kind of madman then?" and she repeats, "...I absolutely trust him." See but Octavian applies some pressure about how River only controls the Doctor "so long as he doesn't know" who she is. "You cost me any more men, and I might just tell him." Because this one soldier... Oh wait no, now there are like five more. Got it. "Bless you, Bishop," says the Doctor, because atheism is fresh and cheeky.

At this point, Amy starts counting down from ten. It only takes a second to notice because there's so much going on, which makes it super creepy, even if in retrospect it's not even close to subtle. What would make it awesomely creepy is if it were going anywhere, but it's not going anywhere, so being creepy on its own merits will have to suffice. Not to spoil it, but the

counting literally gets explained later as "Because it's sort of creepy, yeah?" Which takes one of the few non-retarded parts of the episode and retards it right up again. So there are some hammered-in sort of shoehorned-in kind of forced-in situations where Amy counts down from ten, at this point. What else is going on? Oh, they have to open the door or close the door or get through one door into another, some more. Remember ["Waters Of Mars."](#) how they had all those doors and they were always going through them and throwing little fits and then going through more doors? Like that, only even more heart-pounding, because of the unmoving statuary.

River and the Doctor act like bastards some more, all "of course!" and grinning and ignoring everybody else when they try to ask what the hell they're talking about, for no real reason, and they finally get through another door and into a forest. It's things like this that make me think Moffat would not be fun to be around in real life. River snots at Amy about how it's both "forest" and "oxygen factory," at once, because Amy is an idiot this week even more than last week. She really has problems understanding this simple concept -- although it doesn't stop her from tearing up in some childlike damn wonder.

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They set out through the forest, I guess looking for another way out, and Amy's at eight and still like, "But trees! On a spaceship?" Then the Doctor explains the plot of the movie *Avatar*, how the trees are "treeborgs" and have cheap-looking rope lights inside them "sucking in starlight, breathing out air," even though they'd be doing that anyway, which is the point of having a forest on a spaceship, so all this does is complicate and stupidify things more. "A forest in a bottle, on a space ship, in a maze. Have I impressed you yet, Amy Pond?" No, but be sure and keep asking.

Angel Bob calls him on the walkie, and he's rude some more, and there's not really a reason to discuss anything with the Doctor except to tell him what Amy is too stupid to tell him, i.e. how sometimes sand pours out of her eyeball, because the Angels are in her eyeball. Didn't we already know that? I guess once you've heard "There's something on your back" eighty-seven times, anything with the construction "There's blank in or on your blank" starts being super scary. Angel Bob blabbers some more, explaining that there's a source of power unrelated to the radiation and what have you, and he says the Angels are laughing because quote "...You haven't noticed yet. The Doctor in the TARDIS hasn't noticed!"

Suddenly in the side of the place they're hanging out, just outside the forest, the great Crack that has been in every episode -- "two parts of space and time that should never have touched" -- and then we run and we run and we run. There's a bunch of "We're not leaving without you!" and "YES YOU ARE!" and that kind of thing. He sonics the Crack and goes, "Good, and not so good. Oh, this isn't even a little bit good!" Surprise, the Crack is bad news. Then things get really annoying: The statues show up, and they start moving around. Onscreen. Which, then what is the point of the Weeping Angels? You've officially gotten rid of every single thing that makes them cool, at this point. They're just big dumb monsters. It's so mortifying.

So now the Angels have the Doctor by the collar, and he's explaining to them that the Crack is "pure time energy" and "the fire at the end of the universe," which I guess they can't feed on. Not sure what the whole point of the Doctor sonicking and studying and blowing open the Crack back in the first episode, since apparently this time it makes sense in a whole new way that we didn't get to know about until now but he should have. He takes off, leaving his jacket in their hands, and runs into the forest to join the other guys. They're like, "Dang!" Their faces are like that. "Aw, snap!"

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Amy finally drops on the ground and has a big dramatic lie down. Octavian is not interested in dealing with that. River yells, out of nowhere. "Father Octavian, when the Doctor is in the room, your only mission is to keep him alive long enough to get everyone else home. And trust me. It's not easy. If he's dead back there, I'll never forgive myself. And if he's alive, I'll never forgive him." But it's hilarious, because the Doctor is standing right behind her. How embarrassing for River Song!

The Doctor tells Amy that the crack in the wall is the end of the universe, and then yells at her and frankly is a real jerk for no reason. I'm not interested in this part at all, where the Doctor yells at people to shut the fuck up while asking them questions because he's thinking so hard. I think that's going too far, it's neither funny nor meaningful because it's so shitty. Maybe if you have no social skills that wouldn't seem like a really terrible thing to do, but it is. Just take it on faith. On the other hand, it provides a texture that rubs up against the only actually important scene in this episode, coming up in two paragraphs, that makes it really quite effective, so it gets a pass.

Amy rolls around on the floor with Angels in her eyes, something we've known about for awhile now, and they explain it to us literally one thousand times, and Amy's pretty sure she's dying, and why's she counting? Because it's creepy. This is where Angel Bob explains that the counting is meaningless, except as manipulation. Of Amy or of us, you be the judge.

Suddenly Amy can't open her eyes or she'll die, because she'll keep counting. That sort of makes sense. The Doctor leaves Octavian and the Clerics to look after blind Amy, and takes River off toward the Primary Flight Deck, where they will stabilize the wreckage, stop the Angels, and cure Amy. How? He'll do a Thing. What Thing? "It's a Thing in progress, respect the Thing. Moving out!" Am I wrong or is the third time he's made that joke? Octavian doesn't want to let River out of his sight, but doesn't explain yet that he is her chaperone and that she's officially still in jail. Why? So it will be more mysterious.

"I'll be back for you soon as I can," the Doctor promises, and blind Amy says, "You always say that." They say goodbye and take off, and Amy worries to herself, but then suddenly the Doctor appears, wearing his jacket, more worried and compassionate than he was a moment ago. He begs her to trust him, at length. "If I always told you the truth, I wouldn't need you to trust me... Remember what I told you when you were seven?" She doesn't. He begs her to remember, holding her temple against his own, nearly weeping, and then kisses her forehead and disappears.

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Still without his jacket, the Doctor follows River and Octavian through the forest. River screws around not answering the Doctor's questions about her relationship to Octavian, and finally the Bish has had enough. "Dr. Song is in my personal custody. I released her from the Storm Cage Containment Facility four days ago, and I am legally responsible for her until she has accomplished her mission and earned her pardon." So it's like *To Catch A Thief*, or that movie about Catherine Zeta-Jones's ass.

The Doctor is somewhat intrigued by this, but then instead of pursuing it, he shows her some machinery and explains what we know about the Crack so far: "One day there'll be a very big bang. So big every moment in history, past and future. will crack." He shows her the date of the explosion, when the Crack begins, and it's Amy's wedding day. Meanwhile Amy sits, hamstrung and blinded -- having left the Library, essentially -- and there's like six soldier-priests taking care of her. Then the lights start going out as the Angels somehow are ripping the treeborgs apart, and the soldiers are getting nervous.

The whole reason they are called *Weeping Angels* is because they cover up their faces so they can't see each other because if they see each other they will stay stuck in their quantum-locked stone forms. Just saying. Even if these are substantially different because they are stronger (as we were told in the first half) or weaker (which we were told in this half I think), that would still be true. They are still called that name. I hate this fucking episode.

The Doctor's pointless ellipses have even begun to annoy River, formerly his partner in crime. "Time's running out... What if it could? Time! What if time could run out?" I wish somebody would do that shit to him so he would see how obnoxious it is. There's lots of scary light-dark-light going on with Amy's life, and the Doctor running around being a dick, and then the Crack starts opening up at the nub end of the forest, through the trees. The Angels disappear, running away as quickly as possible, and then the soldiers start heading over to check out the Crack, and vanishing not just from the situation but also time and space. The only one that remembers them at all, in fact, is Amy.

So you've got Weeping Angels, gravity is an issue, cybernetic trees, a great jolly Crack in Everything, soldier-priests vanishing from existence, Amy's got sand coming out her eyes and is now blind and is also counting down, you got the Doctor somehow having his jacket on and not having his jacket on, the reanimated brain matter of Sacred Bob, River Song is the Doctor's wife and also a jailbird... I mean, it's exhausting. It's fun to throw all the pieces up in the air but you do actually have to catch them, also. It's called "spinning plates," not "awkwardly dropping plates because you had too many plates."

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"Cracks in time, time running out... No, couldn't be. How is a duck pond a duck pond if there aren't any ducks? And she didn't recognize the Daleks! Okay, time can shift. Time can change. Time can be rewritten... Ah! Oh!"

Ah oh, indeed. The soldiers describe the Crack thusly, for Amy's benefit: "It's like, I don't know... A curtain of energy. Sort of shifting. Makes you feel weird. Sick." Amy keeps threatening to open her eyes up just for a second and look at the Crack, and of course they finally point her in the right direction and she confirms that it's the same shape as her bedroom wall Crack from the olden days, and the soldiers try to get her to close her eyes, and then more of them hustle into the breach and never existed. Amy is able to grasp this concept, but not how it's a super-magical Crack that's following her and is the same shape as this previous other super-magical Crack in her bedroom. To be fair she hasn't seen it flying directly out of her TV screen at her face like one million anvils each and every week, but it still doesn't seem that complicated to me. She also doesn't seem to grasp the idea that if she doesn't close her eyes again, she will die, but again -- to be fair -- that is stupid. Maybe Amy isn't paying attention for the same reason I'm finding it so difficult.

The Doctor is annoying and fugued out, bugging Octavian and doing math in the air: "Time can be unwritten," he says all in ellipses, while Amy has another conversation about the soldiers that don't exist anymore back at basecamp, and here's what he says: "It's been happening and I haven't even noticed! The CyberKing! A giant cyberman walks over all of Victorian London and no one remembers... Never mind the Angels. There's worse here than Angels!" Then suddenly an Angel has Octavian in a headlock, and there's nothing the Doctor can do about it. Apparently. The music would have you believe this is tantamount to the end of the universe, but if the overcooked score doesn't bother you by now, it's never going to.

Octavian immediately slides into the old "There's no way out of this. You have to leave me!" which is annoying every single time and has already happened fifty times in this story alone.



Luckily he takes some time out of dying so that he can explain a bunch of shit without actually explaining anything, and here's what *he* says: "River Song. You think you know her, but you don't. You don't understand who or what she is. I've told you more than I should... She killed a man. A good man. A hero to many. You don't want to know [who], sir. You really don't." He has a sort of heroic death scene that would be really great -- such a fabulous character, and actor -- if it weren't so random and shoved into everything else, and if the stakes weren't on roids like usual and if everything weren't so hysterical and screamy for no real reason.

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"I will die in the knowledge that my courage did not desert me at the end. For that I thank God, and bless the path that takes you to safety," he says, and when the Doctor says he wishes he'd known him better, he goes, "I think, sir, you know me at my best." He is not ready to die, but he is content. And then he's dead.

The Doctor heads inside the Primary Flight Deck and is super mean to River Song, while out in the forest all the Clerics vanish one by one. Then she's alone. "There was a light and they walked into the light," she tells the Doctor on the walkies, instead of saying, "You know that big old Crack from when we met? It's here and it's eating priests." No, better to keep things vague. So now the Doctor feels bad about leaving her back there with the Crack, and he... Whew, this is dumb. Okay, she's got to use the walkie-talkie to find her way through the forest to him, without opening her eyes, through all the Angels.

The ones that kill you if you aren't looking at them? Yes, those ones.

Also, they're constantly moving around in this episode. Well, twice. On the other hand, the Doctor's trousers are really working for me this week. That jacket he's not wearing that he's usually wearing, it covers up a lot of really valuable real estate. I hate that damned jacket. So anyway, if the "Time Energy" catches up with Amy, she'll never have been born. "It will erase every moment of your existence!" You will never have lived at all." So... Kind of like the Angels, back when they were cool? Yeah, those ones. The Angels are now running away from the Crack, because they thought it was a good meal but the meal is actually them. So they are also coming toward the Doctor, like Amy. But for some reason, they are not moving so fast, so she's coming through this forest full of unmoving statuary that nobody is looking at. And while that makes no sense, at all, check out this shit: "Amy, this is important. The forest is full of Angels. You're going to have to walk like you can see."

I guess all those people the Angels killed were just lacking *confidence*. I mean, it's dumb enough to rewrite basic rules, but this is just going out of your way to rewrite the Angels, and also be ridiculous. So the Angels that you have to always be looking at or they will kill you, now you can be around them with your eyes completely closed, as long as you *pretend that you can see*. I don't even have anything funny to say about that. It is insulting. You are basically being called an idiot by this show. "HEY *IDIOT*," the show is saying, "THANKS FOR WATCHING THIS SHITTY EPISODE OF A SHOW."

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How do we stop the Crack? Well, we can't. Not until the season finale when the Pandorica opens and Silence falls. Or I guess if this episode is anything to go by, you could just stick your fingers in your ears and go *la-la-la* whenever it is around, and it will be fooled. But first let's try a "big complicated spacetime event" which should shut it up for a while, like for example the Doctor. Or Weeping Angels. Just chuck 'em in there and it'll be fine. But make sure and have yet another huge fucking emotional showdown about how Doctor you can't sacrifice yourself because

believe in the stars and adventure and never growing up and blah-blah-blah. But first, let's discuss this: "The Angels are scared and running. Right now they're not that interested in you. They'll assume you can see them, and their instincts will kick in. All you've got to do is walk like you can see. Just don't open your eyes. Walk like you can see."

I realize that is a tall order, because it's several stupid things at once. And I realize Amy's sense of self-preservation lies generally somewhere below the standard of her fellow strippers or even coke whores, but do you think you could just focus on this retarded idea long enough to get to the Primary Flight Deck? Which seems to be a few yards away on this tiny cheap little set? No? No, you cannot? You'd rather trip over a root and drop your walkie-talkie and start screaming out loud about how you're blind and so forth? *Women*. Can't live with 'em, can't expect them to be somehow blinded and yet also see where they are going, while walking with an air of confidence that screams "I am totally not blind right now! My closed eyes are wide open!"

I mean, I think I get it, from a writerly perspective. You're like, "People liked the Angels episode, and I have my own huge story about River Song to tell and really make my mark. What makes an Angels episode better? Oh, if there's lots more of them, totally. And Marines, they had those in *Aliens*. But what else? Hmm. What if instead of *not* blinking, you had to *always* be blinking? Like with your eyes shut? Reversatron! That would be kinda cool. And then, what's scary? Being alone in the forest in the dark. What if you had to have your eyes shut in the forest?" Which I will not deny is all very awesome. But then to pick this idea -- not even an idea, like the germinal seed of an idea -- by the scruff of the neck and drop it into a pot with the other fifty things? That's not how you grow a seed. It's just weird and embarrassing.

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River Song teleports Amy into the room with them, having gotten the thing working, so that's the fifth problem in this episode alone that seemed like a really big deal for like five seconds and then got all fixed by an unknown mysterious solution we didn't know about. The Doctor threatens to kiss her, and she grins. "Ah well, maybe when you're older." Cheeky! Okay so now the problem is that the Angels are almost done draining the power for their luncheon, which they need because they're so busy running away from the Crack.

They would like the Doctor, if you please, to toss himself into the Crack so that everybody else will live, including them. They ask really politely, but still, clearly that is not going to happen. The Doctor tells River and Amy to hold on tight -- about sixty hilarious punnilicious times because they don't know what he means right away but once they do he's a genius! -- and then reverses the gravity so that the Crack is suddenly *down*, and all the Angels go tumbling in. Which would be awesome, except for the real John Irving feeling you're going for, we'd have to know more than two things about the ship, but all we know is the gravity and forest, and obviously it's going to be one or the other, and then it's totally obvious what he's going to do, because you only know these two facts.

Also, is this on purpose? In the first half, River tells the interesting tuxedo man to hold on tight and then she airlocks herself. I really do wish I could believe that this is not a coincidence, but the whole second half is so messy and distracted and silly and strung-together that I really think it is. I think he's just got this limited number of ideas in his head, or wrote them all in a week when he had these particular things going on, and it's all paralleling and matching up in strange incorrect ways, because what's a tic and what's a legit seed planted? I can tell you that, as much as I hate the ending of this episode, with the creepy hypersexualized trauma victim stuff, I have made my piece with that, as discussed previously. And there's a scope to the season that's only now coming into view, and I think it's brilliant if I have even half a clue as to where it's headed.

But it's things like that which make me wonder, because maybe it's just dumb. Maybe it's just sound and fury and misogyny.

Bad Wolf Bay. Amy climbs out of the wreckage, once all of this is taken care of, with her eyes closed, which is worth a joke or two but are only really at her expense, so it's not even funny but just kind of, "Amy acts stupid so we can call her stupid, because that's funny." The Doctor explains, this is a little dodgy, that the Crack ate the Angels and thus the Angel in her eyeball never actually existed. But you know how this whole season apparently hinges on what Amy does and does not remember? How we keep going back to that every five minutes? She asks the very important question of why she can remember the various soldiers and things, and the Angels themselves, if they never existed. "You're a time traveler now, Amy. Changes the way you see the universe. Forever!" Oh, well then. Good thing we haven't been worrying at and over that whole deal like this entire time.

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And the Crack? The Crack is calmed down for a bit, but "The explosion that caused it is still happening, somewhere out there. Somewhere in time." When is an answer not an answer? When it's presented with a bunch of hocus-pocus, that's when. They wait around for River's pickup back to jail, hoping she has earned her pardon, but it's all sort of sour or at least bittersweet because we know how she dies, and that's weird. Also, she goes, "You, me, handcuffs: Must it always end this way?" I don't know why that's funny, because she does have cuffs at the Library, but she dies in the Library, so I don't really understand." Who was the dude she killed? Why not just tell him? Because it's mysterious!

"A very good man. The best man I've ever known. It's a long story. Doctor. Can't be told, it has to be lived. No sneak previews. Well... Except for this one. You'll see me again, quite soon. When the Pandorica opens." He laughs in her face and says it's a fairytale, but she goes, "Oh, Doctor. Aren't we all?" If I have to hear about how this season is a fairytale one more goddamn time I will go bonkers. We get it! You did not invent the concept! Everybody says goodbye and the Doctor asks him if he can trust her, and just for old smug times' sake she goes, "If you like. But where's the fun in that?" She is so quippy for somebody without an actual personality.

The Doctor acts all moody and thinks about how time can be rewritten, here are my cheekbones, things of this nature, maybe thinking about her death when he says that bit, but with a smile so who knows, and Amy says she wants to go home, and he sadly agrees because this one was so Amy-endangering, but she says she just wants to show him something. Specifically, that she's running from her future the same way the Doctor is running from River, whatever that means. They hang out in her bedroom in that magical old house that time forgot, and the Doctor stares at her wedding dress and asks her what the hell she's doing without her ring: "Why did I leave my engagement ring when I ran away with a strange man the night before my wedding? You really are an alien, aren't you?"

I guess I'm an alien too because that makes a certain amount of sense but is also dreadful. I kind of love how she tests him at this point, like, "Oh no, I'm crazy as shit. You were not wrong to think that. Check out my wedding gown." There's a gleeful pride in having blown the Doctor's mind. He hopes she's going to marry Hot Jeff, because wouldn't you, but it's actually Rory, so that's... Awesome. I can't wait for him to do some heroic shit or die horribly, either way we're getting a big fucking speech about it, to convince us all that Rory is/was super great and then ten years from now he can be the argued thing on everybody's lists of their favorite Companions and blah blah blah. Hey fans of the show, here's a guy that looks exactly like you and guess what? He's the best! So then Amy tries to jump the Doctor.

She chases him around the room and you can almost hear the *Benny Hill* music and she yanks on his necktie and stops making any kind of sense, and he's freaked out and I guess it's being played for laughs, but Amy is so brittle and weird and warped and obsessed with him and it's in her bedroom where her raggedy shrines to him are everywhere and there she is, going after his junk with the singlemindedness of a *Doctor Who* fan, and it's just... Gross. There is something gross about it. As a lead-in to the next two episodes it's brilliant, but in the moment it's just wicked creepy. It's not even sad, which I thought it would be.

The Doctor hits pause on her scary little acting-out, and suddenly he's all, "It's you. It's all about you. Everything. It's about you! Amy Pond! Mad. Impossible Amy Pond. I don't know why. I have no idea. But quite possibly the single most important thing in the history of the universe is that I get you sorted out right now." Instead of punching him for once again not saying a goddamn thing in all that random chatter that means anything, and for once again only talking to seem interesting, Amy is all, "I know! Let's BONE!" But no, it's off to the next adventure some more, and he loads Amy's blue balls up into the blue box and... I mean, this is all going to work out and be brilliant. I believe that now. This episode is ridiculous and silly and makes no sense and is full of bullshit and frippery, but you can see from here that shit is about to get awesome.

Keep an eye on what everybody's wearing, don't think too hard about the Weeping Angels, and remember to walk like you can see even when your eyes are closed. Or something.

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## TWOP | Doctor Who Recaps S5E6 – Honeymoon in Venice

<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/the-vampires-of-venice...>

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This'll be short. Not because I hated it -- I actually really liked it -- but because I'm in a hurry and have mismanaged my time once again. I think I'm coming down with something, and I've got a train to catch. But at least I am in a good mood. Which is funny, because this is exactly the sort of lightweight episode that would have once enraged me, but for some reason -- possibly the simplicity of the story, possibly the fact that there actually *is* a story -- I am charmed.

So in 1580 Venice, this dude brings his late-teens daughter to a lady's school and has decided that she suddenly has no prospects because he is a boat-builder. They are both black for no reason, and the music is super-hype *Godfather*-type stuff, for at least two reasons. Now, I like this episode, but already you have several concepts going that need explaining before the first line has gotten finished being uttered. Apparently this is 1580 Venice, plus black people, plus the fact that they never found out about how the Black Plague ended like three hundred years ago, because this lady that runs this school has decided that they shouldn't know about that. How many lines does that entire alternate-history thing -- which pretty much derails most of human thought -- take up? One. Maybe it all goes back to the duckpond and the whole forgotten CyberKing thing, I'm not sure.

"There's no future for us," he begs the main lady. "No future but you." Which is what she wanted, is for everybody to think that she's the boss of them and their mommy. She drags it out for a while and then finally accedes. He falls all over himself with gratitude, which kind of tripped me out because it's like, yesterday: No problem. Today, though, huge problem! So they're like, "Say goodbye to Isabella," and then all of a sudden she's a member of the school. Which seems like the Veelas in *Harry Potter*, as most of their "classes" are like Marching Through The Streets Wearing A Veil, Swanning About In Your Underwear 101, and Being Creepy In Basements. They don't say the main lady's name like the entire episode, but it's Rosanna Calvieri, and she is *awesome*.

So they kick dad out of there, and everybody sort of stares at Rosanna because her dress is so amazing, and her wormy son/boyfriend takes a big old sniff of Isabella, and acts totally dorky, and swishes around all over the place and then suddenly he's got a million teeth, like a barracuda. Isabella is screwed, forsooth. Her scream turns into...

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Rory's stag night, where he is yelling like a hooligan. He's drunk, and pretty charming, and what he is up to is calling Amy's voicemail to say cute things. "The reason for this call is because I haven't told you for seven hours that I love you! Which is a scandal! And even if we weren't getting married tomorrow, I'd ask you to marry me anyway! Yes, I would! Because you are smashing!"

Then the stripper music starts so he hangs up on his fiancée who is also a stripper so that he can look at the stripper. But then it is not a stripper, it's the Doctor, who has come to get Rory so they can fix things and get Amy's shit together so she'll stop trying to kiss him on his alien mouth. Paternalistic, yes. But after her screamin-meemie scariness last week, I think the proper choice.

There's a thing developing here that's really interesting, having to do with Amy refusing to grow up, stuck in the time and place when the Crack appeared, so if the Doctor is going to fix what he did to her, he needs to get her jump-started again. All of which we knew, and is really great, because it turns the whole "places in space and time that never should have touched" into exactly what it needs to be, to justify this season. I'm in love with all of this. But it's wicked ambitious -- not to say presumptuous -- to write this particular story given the assumptions that Mofo's working under, and I'm not seeing a lot of success on that front, because the story underway is getting staticked by two things.

The first is that Amy is not a human being, she's a set of signifiers that does whatever the plot needs her to do, even when the plot is *about* her. And there's nothing in her personality that isn't visually covered by "Scots Ginger" in the first place: She's all that and very little more. But that can be fixed, and may well be central to the story. Mostly the problem is the way Moffat thinks about men and women, so you get a lot of interference in the story because what he thinks of as a girl growing up bears *very little resemblance* to what a girl growing up actually looks like.

For Moffat, a girl becomes a woman when she gets married. And I have a huge allergy to that, and the overarching heteronormative constant explaining of what a man is and what a woman is, and my God how I hate the "I knew she was your wife because she emasculates you" bullshit... But honestly, I can't be mad about it. He *actually thinks this*. Your father, or at least grandfather, actually thinks this. These are not alien concepts. And therefore, I am not having a problem with it anymore. This is the story we get, this is the story I'm watching, and if one of the qualities of it doesn't float my boat, oh well. It's not evil and it's not invalidated: It's just imperfect.

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Anyway, the Doctor jumps out of a cake. I've had dreams of this, bowtie included. All the stags stare at him and are confused, and the Doctor goes, "Rory! That's a relief. I thought I'd burst out of the wrong cake. Again. That reminds me, there's a girl outside in a bikini. Could someone let her in, give her a jumper? Lucy. Lovely girl. *Diabetic*." Utterly charming, every second of this. But then he dicks it up by immediately relating how Amy kissed him and it was a good kiss, and then everybody stares, and then he does the cutest thing I've ever seen, this [Adam Brody move with one arm, that just perfectly encapsulates the awkwardness of it all](#). Brilliant.

Credits, and then you've got the Doctor wearing adorable goggles and soldering or something, his hair looks great, he's giving the happy couple a weird speech about how every Companion is broken: "Oh! The life out there, it dazzles. I mean, it blinds you to the things that are important. I've seen it devour relationships, and plans... Because for one person to have seen all that, to



taste the glory and then go back, it will tear you apart." Therefore, he is sending Rory and Amy on a date.

They get into a slight dick-measuring contest about how Rory is not sufficiently enraptured by wonder with regard to the TARDIS, but Rory holds his own, explaining that he read up on the Doctor and dimensions and whatnot after the Prisoner Zero thing. He doesn't blink. I mean, he's as much of a cardboard thing as Amy is, and I find the actor by turns delightful and annoying as hell, but it's written toward a very cool thing, where it's almost like the Doctor is setting Rory up against himself, to say "no" to him, as much as it's about putting distance between him and Amy.

They head into Venice and the Doctor babbles his usual nonsense about the history of Venice and Casanova and wacky zany talk. They find out about Calvieri's lies about the plague -- which is totally interesting and they don't go into it at all! -- and the psychic paper says that Rory is a eunuch, and they giggle and run around for all of ten seconds before they spot Isabella's father harassing the Veelas on their morning constitutional and trying to get his daughter out of there. There's hissing and teeth and whatnot, and the Doctor runs off to brief Dad, who says something is going on with the Calvieri School: "Something magical, something evil. My own daughter didn't recognize me. And the girl who pushed me away, her face... Like an animal!"

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For some reason Rosanna is out in the courtyard on her knees in the amazing gown, drinking from a huge chalice which is being refilled by this guy in a silly hat. It's an amazing image but I think that's all it is. Francesco, the mewling son/lover, comes down all "We never interrupt Mummy when she's hydrating," which is sort of chilling. She reclines against a fountain and he puts his head on her lap and it's so, so gross. I wonder if that much heavy velvet rubbing against that much heavy velvet... Do you think there's a squeaking sound? I bet there's a squeak.

Wormy Francesco is nervous because of Isabella's dad, and thinks they should start the ruckus early, whatever it is. "...We've already converted more than enough. Surely it is time to introduce them to my brothers?" (Sure enough, it's what you think. Remember that *Buffy* with the swim team? It's like that, with the fish rape and whatnot.) Rosanna basically tells him to cram it like ten times, and stop being so weaselly and whiny and awful, and says that the plan remains: "Let them hammer on our door. Beg to be taken."

Okay. So then creepy Francesco goes off to make more theatrical movements somewhere. Meanwhile Rory is grilling Amy about what she's been doing on their pre-wedding night, and he's all, "Did you miss me?" And she's like, "Not especially," and they think about how the Doctor is totally right and he will turn you into a scary thing if you're not careful because he doesn't actually understand the idea of growth or change because he's forever, and then that's a bummer so they instantly stop thinking about it, and decide to continue their amazing date. Of course, it takes ten seconds before somebody else gets eaten -- by the creepily sneakily staring eyes of Francesco -- and Amy immediately busts into action, leaving Rory with just a little Amy-shaped cloud of her dust to deal with. Frenchy does about sixteen more ridiculous things, swishing and hissing and feinting and then... Awkwardly pushes between them in this narrow

hallway, which is so hilarious, like, "Stand aside, jerks. Please." Amy gives chase but there's just a canal where he went, because he is a vampire rapefish of some alien kind, but we don't know that yet. She needs to find the Doctor like immediately.

Daddy does some whining at the front door, but it's not just because that's all he does: It's also so that the Doctor can sneak into the school and have a run in with five Veelas in their nightgowns. It's pretty cute, he's like so excited that he can't see them in the mirror, he is way focused on that, and they're like, "Dude, we are totally vampires, *work it out*." He finally does, showing them the psychic paper, which has become William Hartnell's library card -- cute! -- and then they get all hissing and scary and whatever. He yells, "Tell me the whole plan!" This gambit does not work.

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Amy and the Doctor run into each other's arms and dance around, super queer as Rory watches, yelling about vampires. The Doctor's sort of a jerk to Rory, but that's nothing new. The Doctor decides they need to get into the house -- a place he just was -- but that for some reason this time it's going to take an incredibly complicated plan that it takes like half of the episode to discuss. They head over to Daddy's house, and he says that the House of Calvieri is like a fortress and you can't get in, even though they just got in.

This part I'm unsure about, plotwise, but the actual reason for the scene is so they can talk about Amy like she's not even in the room, basically whether or not it is meet to send her in like a Charlie's Angel and pretend to be a proto-Veela so that... Something, I dunno. A trapdoor is involved. Don't worry about it. There's a really cute moment where Rory realizes he's sitting on a ton of gunpowder, and the Doctor puts his hand on Rory's shoulder and plays it cool, and they are both neat. The point is that the Doctor and Rory both have ideas about Amy's safety, and Amy is a goon so she has no feelings about her own safety, so once again she'd be better off listening to the menfolk. And secondarily, the Doctor gets his way.

So then Rory is going to pose as her brother, a gondola driver, and there's sort of an icky thing where Amy asserts that Rory is more believable as her brother, while the Doctor is more believable as her boyfriend -- not her father, given that he looks about nine years old -- or something. It squicks everybody out, even Isabella's dad who hasn't had to sit through this shit all season. The Doctor is like, "Can we please not talk about this even though I keep setting it up to talk about this." Luckily, he's so great that he sells even this.

They head into the Veela school and Rory does a bunch of cute stuff, and they think about how Amy is just perfect for getting raped by fish, and old Frenchy licks his lips and whirls around and does a back handspring and whatever is ridiculous and fey, and they kick Rory out and she's like, "Tell Uncle... Doctor... I'll see you both pretty soon, okay? I'll be fine!"

I bet she won't be, but then she will be, and then it'll be dicey for awhile, but everything will work out in the end. I also bet that the Doctor is going to save Venice somehow, and everybody will clap for him like that time he took a ride in a balloon. So they stick Amy in this Spartan sort of cell and she meets Isabella, who is well down the road to becoming a vampire lady: "They, um... They come at night. They gather around my bed and they take me to a room with this

green light and a chair with straps, as if for a surgeon." HOW AWFUL. Hearing about this stuff is much scarier than seeing it. End result: "I wake up here. And the sunlight burns my skin like candle wax."

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Rory and the Doctor have that same fight again, and is she in terrible danger or what, and Rory brings up the kissing, and the Doctor's like, "Now? You want to do this now?" Rory points out, cleverly, that he's "getting married in 430 years" and thus has a right to know. Sometimes that joke doesn't work, but this time it did. The Doctor explains about the Angels and that, and how it was the scariest episode for Amy personally ever, and then they were no longer in danger. Okay, but what Rory wants to know is did he kiss her back. "No. I kissed her mouth." NICE. Rory is not as impressed by that as anybody else would be, but he has a right to be unimpressed. The Doctor says that in any normal circumstance it would have been Rory she kissed, because he belongs in her life, and thus: Venice 1580. "Can we go and see the vampires now, please?"

Amy's not doing so hot. Rosanna was not actually confused by the psychic paper that they used to get her into the school, because she's totally awesome. So yeah, she's not really having Amy's shit. Instead, she would like to tie her to a chair and do creepy magic stuff to her without giving her the option of sneaking around the place. This is happening while Rory and the Doctor do a lot of getting into the House and comparing the sizes of their portable ultraviolet things, one of which looks like a fluorescent tube and the other of which is a tiny little thimble of a thing. Guess whose is whose? Yeah. Dick jokes!

Rosanna asks Amy whether she fell "through the Chasm," which means these rapefish are Crack-related, which is exciting. "I need to know what this girl is doing, in a world of savages, with psychic paper!" Frenchy is not interested, he just wants to eat her or do whatever creepy things, but Amy is in Tank Girl mode and being a smartass about everything, which is probably the way to go. I mean, Rosanna is awesome, one of my favorite bad guys ever on this show, but you can really throw her game by acting like she's not the queen of the world. "Tease me as if I were your dog? Well, this dog has a bite, girl." Sounds totally scary and shouty, but she tosses off the line in this adorably flighty, funny way like they're at a dinner party. Then the teeth come out, though.

Rory's worried about the wedding or something, and they find a bunch of drained-dry bodies. It's not about blood, it's about water. These vampires just keep getting less and less cool. Frenchy asks Mommy if they can "share" Amy, and it's exactly as flesh-crawling as you think. As much as I love Rosanna, that's how much I hate his ass. He is like getting touched in your bathing suit area. Downstairs, Rory and the Doctor are spitballin' some theories about what is overall going on, and randomly Rory gets his Clive on: "You know what's dangerous about you? It's not that you make people take risks. It's that you make them want to impress you." (*Love that.*) "You make it so they don't want to let you down. You have no idea how dangerous you make people to themselves when you're around." I like this speech but the face Rory is making, not so much. He just looks petulant and whiny and British, instead of like proud and thoughtful like his words. His nose is not the worst thing about his face, and he's getting better looking, but the hair! And this isn't even as bad as it's going to get!

Veelas show up and chase the boys around downstairs while Rosanna gets awesome in Amy's face: "This is how it works. First, we drink you until you're dry. Then we fill you with our blood. It rages through you like a fire, changing you, until one morning you awake and your humanity is a dream, now faded." Francesco swishes around the room about how maybe she will die. But if she doesn't die? Raped by ten thousand fish. "Yeah, sorry. I'm kind of engaged." Amy kicks Rosanna's fannypack, which it turns out is some kind of image inducer, and for a second she looks like a giant CGI vampire fish, then pulls it together. She looks totally offended, like, "How could you kick my fannypack?"

Then they hear a commotion, and leave Amy tied to the chair so they can go stand in this hallway and chat with the Doctor. He goes, "Cab for Amy Pond?" Which is adorable. Isabella appears out of nowhere and cuts Amy loose, Amy with a big old vamp bite on her neck, and the Doctor ultraviolets the Veelas so they can get out of there. They run through lots of corridors and hallways and things and keep shining the UV whenever the people get close, and then the Doctor and Amy giggle all about how they're aliens, not vampires, and how awesome is that, and Rory's like, "That's good news? What is *wrong* with you people?" Cue more giggling. Is this why people hated Rose so much? I never understood that.

Anyway, down at the dock outside Isabella's dad is for some reason wearing one of the t-shirts from Rory's stag. It's a sight gag, I don't get it, but there it is. It's funny to look at but I feel like I missed something as to why he is wearing it. They get out of there with Isabella, but she gets burnt by the sunlight and hisses and cringes just long enough to get pulled back in there. Then the door electrocutes him with purple science, for some reason. He falls down dead. Just kidding, he's fine. Amy turns her worry to Dad, who just kind of wasted his entire day.

"And so in memory of the children lost to the Silence, the traitor is delivered to the arms of those she betrayed." They toss Isabella in the canal and she gets raped/eaten. Rosanna leads the Veelas and Frenchy down to the water, and he reminds her that she better turn off her fannypack or else her sons will rape/eat her, or something. They share a sweet incest moment, and then she heads inside, where the Doctor is sitting in her ridiculous gold throne. He has figured a bunch of stuff out.

"Long way from Saturnyne, aren't you? Sister of the Water?" She mentions the refugee thing again, and they do this beautiful courtly "question for a question" thing that is all about the acting. The stuff they actually talk about is science fictiony factoids about their race of raping fish people -- how does the fannypack illusion machine work, what are vampires really all about -- stuff you probably care about but I forget it while they're saying it, because it's all pretend anyway. Like, I love in theory the idea of a book all about the *Enterprise D* and where the bathrooms are, but you look at a blueprint or two and then it's like, "What am I even *doing* right now?"

When he tells her he's of Gallifrey, she cuts him to the quick: "You should be in a museum! Or in a mausoleum." Well, not really to the quick, because they're almost friends at this point. They

ran from the Silence, is why they're in Venice 1580. Why is he? "Wedding present." His response question is about the Silence, which she actually delves into a little: "There were Cracks. Some were tiny, some were as big as the sky. Through some we saw worlds, and people, and through others we saw Silence, and the end of all things. We fled to an ocean like ours, and the Crack snapped shut behind us, and Saturnyne was lost." Rosanna, by the way, has a beautiful laugh. He really likes her, I think as much as I do. Such a grace note on what could have been a forgettable episode.

So Earth is the colony, like almost every episode seems like, and she immediately asks the Doctor if he wants to build a new society with her. His response question: "Where's Isabella?" She doesn't recognize the name, but ponies up when he reminds her who that is, by explaining that she threw Isabella in the canal, where she got raped and eaten. The way she describes it, you can kind of respect why she did it. Then she asks the Doctor to be her husband, essentially, and he nearly laughs. "I'm a Time Lord, you're a big fish. Think of the children!" True. She's a total MILF, but in reality that is a lie. Big fish.

She hisses and things head south: "You're right, we're nothing alike. I will bend the heavens to save my race, while you philosophize." The Doctor offers to tear down the House of Calvieri stone by stone, and he's escorted out, and then we get some major Mofo mojo in the ridiculously cheesy form of the Doctor yelling, "And you know why? You didn't know Isabella's name. You didn't know Isabella's name!"

Not so much the rape and murder and lying about the Black Plague and turning girls into breeding-cow Veelas, but Rosanna's insensitivity to the girl she murdered. That's what it's all about.

I mean, maybe that *is* what it's all about. This Doctor seems more about the trees and less about the forest than any other Doctor we know. And somebody on the forums suggested that maybe this had to do with the issue of his Regeneration, dying for Wilf, which I quite like. Who knows, but it's an idea to think about moving forward.

Okay, so now the ridiculous throne is apparently a weather machine of some kind, and suddenly Phase Two of the plan is to make a big storm or whatnot, I forget at this point why but it might be about raising the waters in the canals so high that Venice drowns. Right? We'll get there. She's going from fish to lady to fish to lady, because of Amy kicking her, which is just so irritating. She summons the Veelas, essentially so there can be more adventures.

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Meanwhile, the Doctor is doing the most awful thing this Doctor does, which is tell everybody to shut up while he's thinking, in a way we're meant to think is charming but is really just misanthropic and awful. Smith does the job of undermining the shittiness here, but the shittiness of it is real. The Doctor talks his way through the paragraph above -- while being adorable and snuggle-physical with Rory and Amy -- and realizes that she's going to sink Venice. And then repopulate it with her Veela brood mares, by giving them to the ten thousand husbands. Finally this offends somebody.

The Veelas attack, and there's a shitload of running around, but you already know what's going to happen because of the gunpowder in Act Two. So while Isabella's Dad sacrifices himself nobly by blowing all the Daughters of the Water to hell, obviously, the rest of the episode is happening.

Rosanna is boiling the skies over Venice and the Doctor is getting bossy with Amy -- "We don't discuss this! I tell you to do something, Amy, and you do it!" -- about her personal safety and getting big ups from Rory for joining Team Paternalist Patronizing. Which, Companion is a dangerous job. She signed up for it. Several times. You can't say, "Come out into the dangerous world" and then five minutes later be like, "Don't be endangered!" It's completely dumb, and it gets pulled out at the most random fucking times, just like as a way to get around plot points. But Amy's a person, not a plot point, so it's grody. On the other hand, her look of total betrayal and sadness is more effective than me whining about it, regardless of the Boys' Club deal that happens next.

Rosanna is just on fire today: "You're too late. Such determination, just to save one city. Hard to believe it's the same man that let an entire race turn to cinders and ash. Now you can watch as my people take their new kingdom." He tells her about the dead Veelas, and he's really sad for her, and he asks her to help him save Venice since the whole plan is now shot to hell. She's grateful for his sympathy, but also is now the last person of an extinct race, which is -- as usual -- thanks to the Doctor. Well, the Doctor and the Crack. Because her plan obviously had to be stopped. But still, she's got a lot going on.

Um, there's a swordfight between Rory and Frenchy. It is very basic stuff.

The Doctor reunites with Amy and Rory, who are all about not leaving his side once again, and yells at them about how "One minute it's *You make people a danger to themselves*, the next it's, *We're not leaving you!* But if *one* of you gets squashed, or blown up, or eaten..." Then the Doctor throws down some major science about the throne-weather machine and how there's another "hub" somewhere else and whatever, and he climbs up on a thing and does a thing, and there's lightning, but then the weather goes away again and everybody claps. Not for the Doctor, but because of sunshine.

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Rosanna has decided to kill herself, I think by getting raped and eaten by her kids. I can think of better ways to go. Also, why are you taking off your clothes? Your clothes don't exist! But her simple white shift as she stands there, totally sad and broken, with her hair down and her sad eyes... Ah, it's nice. She is the finest fucking thing. The Doctor feels super duper sad for her, and she's like, "One city, to save an entire species?" Still too high. He finally explains why he's been so okay with the Last of the Time Lord thing, and it makes sense after three Doctors: "I told you, you can't go back and change time. You mourn, but you live." Rosanna is not *having it*. But first she gets one more dig in there: "Tell me, Doctor. Can your conscience carry the weight of another dead race? Remember us. Dream of us." She dies, it's sad, he's sad, but whattaya gonna do.



The Doctor offers to give Amy away, since her family is as nonexistent as the ducks in the duckpond, and because he's still trying to get everybody to agree on their relationship. Like, whatever it is, it needs to just be one unambiguous thing. Which is one of the fun things about next week, and the season as a whole. Rory offers to let them have some more adventures without them -- why? -- but the Doctor and Amy ask him to stay. So Amy hops in the air and goes into the TARDIS to make tea, and goes, "Hey, look at this! Got my spaceship, got my boys. My work here is done."

The way she says it makes it not awful, but then it becomes awful because Rory and the Doctor protest for a moment and then agree that they are "her boys," and it's just so gross. That is not power, that is the illusion of power, first of all, and second of all it's the kind of thing a person would write if they were into getting their testicles stepped on or being forced to clean the kitchen. Anyway, the Doctor tells Rory to listen to something, but all Rory can hear is Silence. Well, and the sound of a few more anvils hitting pavement.

Next week: Truly awesome.

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It's all very idyllic and Merry Englande, and in a nice country house there's a very pregnant Amy stirring something in a big bowl and humming to herself. Maybe this was what the Doctor thought she wanted, or what the Doctor thought her wedding represented; maybe she thought that too. They have two hearts in common. For sure it's what Rory thought. I don't really like wish fulfillment, stories where people yearn most passionately for the most clichéd things they can imagine.

I like stories where those things are proven lifeless, or when you learn that the fantasy life is not really what they wanted at all, or when you find out that the multiple universes are all elaborate constructions meant to harm and defuse. I like anything that privileges change over stasis, and when you're talking about the Doctor, "stasis" is always about life without the Doctor, because all he is, is change.

And when you're talking about "growing up" and whether or not the Doctor can even understand it, you're in sort of a pickle because the Doctor wants her to somehow grow *into* stasis. Or rather, he broke her when she was little, and now she's in stasis forever, as Amelia, and therefore he can't really take her on adventures without keeping her there: He's got to be in charge not only of her change, but also her stasis. And that's harsh, but it's also his responsibility: To help her grow *up* without growing *hard*.

So as much as I continue to be grossed out by the ongoing assumption -- that marriage is the dividing line that makes you a worthwhile human being, i.e. an adult -- that's the story we're getting. And given the way things have been going for the last several years, I suppose the Doctor is entitled to think all girls want to settle down and get married eventually -- they just seemed previously to want these things with a working brain, and not just a big gooshy heart, a certain patronizingly written "feistiness," not to say "bitchiness," and no other personality traits beyond what any given story demands.

It's a lot easier once you understand this is a story written *by* men, *for* men. If you've read a lot of science fiction, or seen a lot of shows on TV, that shouldn't be too terribly hard to comprehend, after all. Just remember this very simple trick: No matter how wonderful every little Amelia is, after a certain age she'll just become another shrew in a miniskirt, and you'll have to marry her. Once she stops being a stripper, of course. Her inner life is not that interesting, because it doesn't exist: Women are just black boxes with obscure mechanics inside that nobody really understands. Start talking about feelings, or subjectivity, and you're off into soap opera.

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Anyway, Amy gasps and drops her -- it's cupcakes, that's what she's making, of course -- drops her bowl and screams for Rory. She screams so loud! That voice they get. She screams and it echoes across the moors or the tundra or whatever they have, and it scares the crows, and it's horrible and deafening. Rory rides up on his bicycle with a stupid fake-looking ponytail and into the house, and the second he's in there everything's fine, she's eating cupcake batter right out of the bowl, propped on her big stupid stomach. He's terrified, but of course it was a false alarm.

To her credit, Amy chuckles winningly and daubs a little batter on his face, woggling eyebrows as she points out she's never had a baby before. When I try to think about somebody less wonderful than Karen Gillan playing this moderately thankless role, I get very nervous. Same deal with old Matt, who always gives the least obnoxious reading possible to the Doctor's rudest lines. So they hear a sound and it's the VWORP, and Rory bitches about leafblowers for some hilarious reason, and they go out running into the garden.

The Doctor has landed in the garden, for which Amy will kill him, and then she comes out to meet him, huffing and puffing, and he remarks for the remainder of the scene, over and over, about how fat she is. Because she's pregnant, you see. I guess he's an alien or something so he doesn't know what pregnancy looks like, which is not only retarded but also makes him look like an asshole who calls her fat several times before finally figuring it out. Ha! Pregnant women are so fat! It's because there's a baby in there!

With spooky old folks looking on, through spooky old windows and dusty old certainties, The Doctor talks about how boring Leadworth continues to be, even five years later, and they give a sort of middle-class shiver about how they live in *Upper* Leadworth now, and apologize for the quietness, explaining that it's "really restful and healthy." The deal is that lots of people in Leadworth live well into their nineties, which is a theme of the two worlds here: In Leadworth, you get old. With the Doctor, you just get cold. Or dead. Or crazy. You can hear the birds already.

"I don't just abandon people when they leave the TARDIS," the Doctor lies. "This Time Lord's for life. You don't get rid of the Doctor so easily." Amy knows better: He just got lost. Perhaps if the Doctor were dreaming this story, he would like to think he is the kind of person that doesn't abandon them, after all. They fill in the blanks for each other, and talk more about how boring their lives are. He makes fun of their benches, and refers to the village specifically as suicidally boring, in such a cute way as you can sort of see his point. And they get a little defensive about the horrors of Leadworth, and how they like to listen to the birds -- and how much less time there was for birdsong, when they were together -- and then Leadworth is so boring they fall asleep, all three of them, there on the bench.

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On the TARDIS the Doctor wakes, and tells them the dream he was having was a nightmare: "...Scary! Don't ask, you don't want to know. You're safe now!" She's not pregnant, Rory's no goofier-looking than usual, and the TARDIS is going a bit crazy. But they had dreams too. Not really a nightmare, they agree: They were married, in a sweet little village, and she was pregnant. Sort of the opposite of a nightmare, really. Not really my cup of tea, but it's a nice dream you could have.

The Doctor finally admits that he had the same, and tries to revise his statements: "Did I say nightmare? No. More of a really-good-mare. Look, it doesn't matter. We all had some kind of psychic episode. We probably jumped a time track." I love that! No big deal, we probably just all got in each other's heads, or smashed across universes or some silly thing. But they can still hear the birds.

The Doctor and Rory wake up with temples together, and jump back away from each other because being gay is bad, and the Doctor checks his blue suspenders while those two run around noting to each other what has clearly just happened, at length. The Doctor gives a jolly big speech while the camera whirls around, once more recapping the episode as it happens: "Trust nothing. From now on, trust nothing you see, hear or feel... You thought you were awake on the TARDIS too... You're home. You're also dreaming. Trouble is, which is which? Are we

flashing forwards? Or backwards? Hold on tight. This is going to be a tricky one!" There's your trailer for ya.

Credits, and then on the TARDIS the Doctor, oh he is angry, kicking the console, hurting his foot, getting off several substandard quips in a row before landing on "Stop talking to me when I'm cross!" One more time we talk about how Leadworth is maybe the dream or maybe this one is the dream, and pregnant women are so hilariously fat, and you know, once this episode actually starts going it's pretty rad, but you're gonna kill me here. It's like watching the same ten seconds over and over because they keep explaining it to each other. "You could be giving birth! This could be the dream. Trust nothing we see or hear or feel." The kids point out that they're on a spaceship that's bigger on the outside, accompanied by a bow-tied alien, which is a good point as far as trusting one's instincts.

A very good point, but not as good as the next thing it implies, which is: What is the danger on the TARDIS side of the equation? Just astronomy. But the guy who's about to show up? Way meaner, or at least scarier, on the TARDIS. Choose this life, and you get both hearts at once. And back in Leadworth, who's his victim? He only wants to hurt one of them, back in the village. Choose that life, and the Doctor himself has to admit some things about himself.

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The TARDIS powers down and goes dead. It's scary. They hear the birds again, and remind each other to remember how it feels, that it feels real on the TARDIS, that the other life is just a myth. The Doctor seems to say this a lot to old Amy, doesn't he? Begging her to remember things she doesn't know yet, and things she never knew. Tears in his eyes. Asking him to trust her when the whole world says he's wrong. Keep those eyes shut, but act like you can see. Hold onto impossible things. Grow up without growing hard. Stay young without staying hard. I think this is the key:

The only way he can help her -- to make Amelia and Amy be the same person, and make that person whole -- is to keep pushing at her from both sides. It's not about Rory or weddings, those are just the clothes this story wears. It's about a God who fucked up, and has to fix what he made. Who has let two moments in space and time touch, and cracked the world. And if you've ever been a person, you know how much easier it is to change, to grow, when you've got things pressing in. When you're trapped and you can't get out, your only chance -- the only choice you have -- is to turn into something else. Seen from this angle, even popping out of Rory's cake like a stripper was necessary for the Doctor to gather them together and push them through this mess he's made.

Amy's already made her choice. She chose something impossible, which is to grow up and marry Rory -- but stave off that moment forever, or as long as she could, by traveling out of her timestream just before anything happened that mattered. When you are forever, you are also never. The moment never arrives, like with a black hole. So by entering Time, L'Engle's *kairos*, she doesn't have to experience time, *chronos*. Amelia was the one that made that choice, and Amy's been paying for it ever since, but it's the Doctor's fault.

Usually when Companions do this, and they always do, they're changed by the adventures themselves, but in Amy's case, her adventure started with Amelia, so that's where it has to end: Not on her wedding day, but in her own repair. Bringing Rory along to Venice could then be the Doctor's way of forcing her to include Rory in her calculations -- to bring him into the trap with her, to help the Doctor save her -- instead of thinking she could leave him on the slow path

forever. And all things being equal -- that is, leaving out the totally gross gender iniquities that are all over the place, just like in most stories -- that's pretty awesome.

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It gets to the relationship between Companion and Time in a wholly new way, while somehow indicting Rose for her treatment of Mickey by responding to it. Which is obnoxious, I think, except that was Rose's story, not Mickey's. And this is anybody *but* Amy's story. And I wonder how incomprehensible all the soap opera stuff was, over the years, for people who don't live in that world -- maybe those are the people who would want Mickey avenged. So while of course I assume I'm right about the ways men and women should treat each other, it's not really interesting to me to persuade anybody else of those, to me, facts.

If I think of how very little I ever cared about poor old Mickey, I can totally acknowledge that if he'd been a harpy in a short skirt -- or Jackie Prentiss-Tyler, for example -- maybe I'd have felt differently. I would have cared very much about his lack of personhood, and felt he was terribly mistreated. I would still be cutting myself off from reading the story on its merits, because either way it's up to us to cross the bridge to the world the story's actually situated. This is a story about men, written for men, by men. We just live in it.

"Okay. This is the real one, definitely this one. It's all solid." Amy is reminded that the TARDIS felt solid, too: "You can't spot a dream while you're having it." The Doctor waves his arms around madly, as this one is prone always to do, wonderfully, searching for pixilation and motion blur, anything that means this world isn't real. We learn that Rory has become a doctor! "Not a nurse," the Doctor points out. "Just like you've always dreamed. How interesting... Your dream wife, your dream job, probably your dream baby. Maybe this is your dream?" And Amy's too, Rory hastens to point out. After a moment she agrees, but the point is made: She has two dreams, too. And now that Rory's seen the stars she's not alone.

The men run straight into the old folks' home, with fat Amy struggling after: "If something doesn't make sense, let's go and poke it with a stick!" Inside, there's all kinds of old people, just wicked old, the way they get in Leadworth. He gets in the faces of the old people, and they act creepier and creepier, and then comes the birdsong.

It's gotten cold in the TARDIS, with everything off. The Doctor tells them not to trust the old people, and then starts yelling about the TARDIS. Even the scanners are down, so they can't see where they are, so they could be anywhere. Choose this life, and you can be anywhere, which means you are nowhere. A man appears, up on the balcony: Him in the bowtie. He giggles, scaring the hell out of the Doctor, laughing at him. "Honestly, I'd heard such good things. Last of the Time Lords, the Oncoming Storm..." He calls himself the Dream Lord, not the Time Lord, but the Doctor's not convinced. He's older, sassy; the Doctor's weirded out by his bowtie. He tosses something through the image of the guy, who blips around the TARDIS inspecting them.

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Amy suggests that the Dream Lord creates dreams, and the Doctor nods. "Dreams, delusions, cheap tricks." The DL asks if the "gooseberry," the third wheel, has a guess, and Rory gets pissy about that: If anybody's the gooseberry, he says, it's the Doctor. That's half-true. The DL says it's a delusion, but not one of his. Rory says Amy shares in this delusion, and the DL tells her to choose. She swears she has, and the DL just laughs. "You can't fool me, I've seen your dreams! Some of them twice, Amy." Some made him blush. The Doctor is not having it.

"Where did you pick up this cheap cabaret act?" The DL laughs and says it's the last thing the Doctor should needle anybody about: "If you had any more tawdry quirks you could open up a Tawdry Quirk Shop! The madcap vehicle, the cockamamie hair, the clothes designed by a first-year fashion student... I'm surprised you haven't got a little purple space dog, just to ram home what an intergalactic wag you are." It's not the meanest thing he'll say, but it might be the truest. The Doctor doesn't quite let it show on his face: How much of him, after the Time War took everything, exists just to make him cuddly? He wasn't always so funny, so charming, so adorable.

The DL explains the game: "Two worlds. Here in the time machine, and there in the Village That Time Forgot. One is real, the other's fake. And just to make it more interesting, you're going to face in both worlds a deadly danger. But only one of the dangers is real. Tweet, tweet. Time to sleep!" Or is that wake up? They hear the birds.

"I've always been able to see through you, Doctor," says the DL, down in Leadworth. Amy doesn't get it, not yet -- "What do you mean, always?" -- but the Doctor does. If you die in the dream, you wake up in the real world, but if you die in the real world, you of course die. Amy's still stuck on "always," and the DL laughs. "Now don't get jealous. He's been around, our boy. Never mind that, you've got a world to choose. One reality was always too much for you, Doctor. Take two, and call me in the morning." Like a doctor would say.

The Doctor, once the DL is gone, tosses out a million explanations for their visitor, but none of them are very convincing. "Maybe because he has no physical form. That gets you down after a while, so he's taking it out on folk like us who can touch and eat and feel." (This is almost right, despite being a lie. Mostly right.) All of the old folks have vanished. He's been wearing an adorable sweater since it got cold; he takes it off now and musses up his hair, but it soon rights itself. Outside, the kids are just playing in the square. Beautiful old stone walls.

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They discuss the matter of dreams a bunch more times, and the Doctor says he can't quite put the pieces together -- the creepy olds, the time slips between the worlds, the ways of telling which is real -- because, he screams, Leadworth is SO DULL! Between his scream and Amy's next gasping false alarm, though, he does say one very interesting thing: "I'm slowing down, like you two have." Choose this world, and you choose death. Nothing magical, maybe, even about the Doctor here.

Rory and the Doctor yell about how they're both doctors, but then Amy's fine. She points out that now, Doctor shivering and white as a sheet, they can't call this world dull anymore. It's true, you can spice things up almost anywhere by constantly shrieking and grabbing at your abdomen.

Old people: Still super creepy. Pregnant women: Still very fat. Bowties: Still cool. Talk turns to Rory's dumb ponytail, as the three of them swing on the abandoned playground. The Doctor continues to be frustrated with the old people, one Mrs. Poggit in particular, and it all gets very suspenseful for a second before the birds come again.

On the cold dead TARDIS, the Doctor shouts at them, quite cross, and sends them off to find something warmer. Rory talks about how great the other, warmer life was: Happy, and settled, and about to have a baby. Amy wonders, though, why in the past five years they would have ever given up the TARDIS. Why anybody ever would. Rory's offended, rightfully so I think, and points out that one thing in the other life's favor is that they aren't freezing to death when they



go there. "The Doctor'll fix it," she shrugs, and he says that their wedding is another point. She laughs as he tosses a white blanket across her back, like a veil.

"We can still get married! Some day..." she trails off awkwardly, which of course he hears in the worst possible way, because he hasn't acclimated himself to the idea that time travelers don't have to deal with consequences -- that time travel means she can have the life of adventure that she wants, and then come on back to the real deal, with him. What she's giving him is a gift, the gift of being young as long as they want, but he wants the real deal now, with her, so he can't hear it.

From the slow path, she ran off with another man on the eve of their wedding. "We're in a time machine! It's the night before our wedding for as long as we want." And I have to say that Rory's got this one right: "We have to grow up eventually." The Doctor agrees, with more than half his hearts, but she wants to be young forever, so she can't hear it. "Says who," she mutters, so carelessly, without even the decency of changing the subject, without even thinking of what she's saying. She can have Rory, she says, but only in this world for as long as she can have it. Before the gears of grace start winding up, and put everybody back in their proper place, like always.

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When they return, they help him to power her up just enough to get the scanners back on: Outside there is a cold star. It's not a malfunction of the engines, it's the freezing star coming closer. "That's our danger for this version of reality," he says, because every scene in this episode needs at least one Jamie Kennedy speech from *Scream* to remind us what's going on. Amy says that's ridiculous, and Rory agrees that this proves Leadworth is real, and though the Doctor protests he doesn't really have an answer for it. All he knows is, they've got fourteen minutes before they crash into it, and much less time than that before they freeze to death. "This just might be the battle we have to lose," he says.

"Oh, this is so *you*... A weird new star, fourteen minutes left to live and only one man to save the day?" Rory has joined the DL in critiquing everything about the Doctor. "I just wanted a nice village and a family," he says, which is a clever bit of writing that throws you off track by adding to the pile of herring, going back a few episodes at least, that says Amy's Choice is between Rory and the Doctor. It's a grody parallel, but it's not the point, and the episode knows that you think that already, so it's a great way to catch you up. The DL appears to sing a little song at this point: "There was an old Doctor from Gallifrey/ Who ended up throwing his life away/ He let down his friends and..." The birds again, and the DL leaves off. "Don't spend too long there, or you'll catch your death here!" he laughs, as they drop away.

The children, last seen playing in the gorgeous old ruins, are now piles of ash. I don't love the whole "old people = creepiness" zombie thing about this story, although once you know who's telling it you know why it's so. But I do love the imagery, of these ancient castles and walls and the children herded between them, lying dead. The Village That Time Forgot, and all that. It's just beautiful to look at, and makes the greater point in a very elegant way. There is a difference between growing *up* and growing *old*, and Amy doesn't know the difference, and the Doctor can't really be expected to understand the difference, so he keeps warning her about the former when he's really scared about the latter, and it all just confuses her more. She's been growing *older* no matter how hard she fights growing *up*.

Rory "just feels" that this is the right world, as we revisit these ideas again with what we've learned or think we learned, and Amy shrugs: "I feel it both places." Rory loves that it's tranquil, and relaxed, and how nothing bad could ever happen there. Amy doesn't see how any of those

things could ever apply to her: "...A pub, two shops and a really bad amateur dramatics society? That's why I got pregnant, so I don't have to see them doing *Oklahoma!*"

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At this point the Doctor figures out that the piles of ash are the village children, and we jump into the next part of the show, which is a bunch of running around. Clearly they don't watch *Torchwood* or they wouldn't worry so much about little kids getting executed right and left. Over on the road, past a lovely wall, the old people have started marching creepily. Apparently, it's not Rory's ministrations that have kept the people alive so old. The Doctor heads right for them, and the DL appears, wearing a mismatched three-piece in colors that match the Doctor's gear. "Hello, peasants! What's this, attack of the old people?"

The DL asks Amy if she wouldn't enjoy jumping under a bus so they could wake up in the TARDIS, and the Doctor goes steely on him. "*Leave her alone.*" It's intense, and sort of hot, which the DL points out. Rory says it again, and the DL's less impressed. "But I know where your heart lies, don't I, Amy Pond? Loves a redhead, the Doctor! Has he told you about Elizabeth the First? Well, she thought she was the first..." And they thought she was a virgin.

The Doctor tells him to stop it, and gets very feral in the face area, and finally admits that he's known who the DL was this whole time. Send the analytical ones and the continuity anoraks spinning, this. Chances are the less you know, the more obvious the DL has become. On a show with less history, this would be a good line, but on this show, it's a great one: "No idea how you can be here, but there's only one person in the universe who hates me as much as you do."

Then it's time to face off with the olds. They are very old and very creepy. One of them grabs Rory by the face and tosses him quite far, and they have horrible eyeballs in their mouths, on disgusting stalks, and those are attached to creatures inside them, and the eyeballs spray some kind of dusting-you gas, and it's just so gross. So gross! Rory's like, "Are those going to be peeping out of anywhere else?" The Doctor sends the kids on their way and gets to the monsters' sociology: "You are Eknodines. A proud, ancient race: You're better than this. Why are you hiding away here? Why aren't you at home?"

At which point, things get intense. If none of this is real, then everything is something else. There's the DL orchestrating it, but the ingredients come from dreams. The choice is between his two hearts: What's the danger on the TARDIS? Something like ice, and fire, that draws you slowly into its orbit; that has no face and no heart at all. And what's the danger here in Leadworth? The olds. He completes their sentences as they speak them: "We were driven from our planet by upstart neighbors." The second he saw that wedding gown in her room, the second she jumped on him, he knew he'd never really have her. "So we've been living here, inside the bodies of old humans, for years." Running their Tawdry Quirk shops and feeding their purple space dogs, hiding aliens inside.

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A boy on a bicycle appears randomly, and is turned to dust. The Doctor gets very intense with them about leaving town, but they are not really buying what he's selling. Rory, slightly elsewhere, slows down for Amy's sake and starts whinging about how he fixed all these old people and kept them alive. One old lady gets all in their faces and Rory tells fat pregnant "Chubs" to get out of the way so he can kill the old lady. To his credit, it takes him a bit of moaning and a sharp word from Amy before he can bust a log over her old lady head.

Locked into a nice little house, Amy is about equally upset about how they've abandoned the Doctor and how Rory called her "Chubs." Rory comforts her, to the best of his ability, so you know they're going to do something stupid if they don't wake up soon.

Meanwhile, the zombies have a very wobbly Doctor pinned in a butchers -- the Doctor actually checks to make sure the sign says CLOSED -- and the DL accuses the Doctor of being a vegetarian, "You big flop-haired wuss," and I must say that if the DL is all about supplying the Doctor with autocritique he seems to be saying that the Doctor is gay a whole lot. I mean, for now, because later on he'll just go on an extended diatribe about how the Doctor is a pedo, so let's not give DL all the credit we might.

The birds finally come, and the DL points out that if the Doctor falls asleep right now, "Several dozen angry pensioners will destroy [him] with their horrible eye things," which is accurate and funny and immediately negated by a terrible pun, and the Doctor pops his fingers in his ears long enough to get inside the freezer before he passes out.

On the cold dead TARDIS, the Doctor says they have to agree which is the real world. The Doctor finally brings up Rory's and maybe his additional factors, which include the idea that maybe they're voting for their regular lives with Amy because they're actually competing over Amy. Amy is grossed out, obviously, but frankly all of them should be. As freezer burn sets in, they talk about their various frozen body parts and put on ridiculous ponchos that she has cut out of blankets.

"My boys! My poncho boys. If we're going to die, let's die looking like a Peruvian folk band," she says, which is a nice and quippy way of saying, "Stop fighting over me like the last piece of pizza, you assholes." They stand there in a weird set-piece for a second, staring at the cold sun, and then abruptly move to the next page of the script. The Doctor does more *Scream*-talk: "If we fall asleep here we're in trouble. If we could divide up, then we'd have an active presence in each world, but the Dream Lord is switching us between the worlds." The DL loves this idea, and sends Rory and the Doctor back to Leadworth so he can get creepy on Amy one-on-one. "Maybe I'll keep her, and you can have Pointy-Nose to yourself for all eternity, should you manage to clamber aboard some sort of reality?"

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The Doctor tells her not to be scared, as they are going, and the DL just giggles and acts horrible, and Amy has her one-per-episode shivering fit about being left alone in the dark by the ones who are supposed to be protecting her.

Rory drags Amy's leaden body up the stairs, into the bright yellow nursery, and locks the door behind them. She's asleep on the floor and it's super scary. He plays with a mobile above the crib for a second, and then gets all angry looking down at them in the garden, poking at the TARDIS and getting ready to assault him. It's fairly awful, even with the ponytail, to see him there with the door blocked and his pregnant wife on the floor and a whole bunch of monsters coming after him.

Inside the butcher's freezer, the Doctor sonicks something or something and they stop with the eyeballs and also close their eyeballs that are located in their eyes, so he pushes past them. There's a kid in a van who is about to get dusted, but the Doctor jumps in the van and somehow they are safe. Then they drive around the town leisurely picking up everybody who's not old. The old people are mostly moving very slow and not doing anything terrible to them, just sort of menacing random groups of white people and being super old. I guess when your

entire village mostly just likes to hang out on benches all day, things could catch you by surprise.

The DL pops in to needle Amy about how the Doctor is constantly leaving her places and not apologizing, and promises he never will. Then he changes into a silky robe and sort of threatens to rape Amy. Um, Truman Capote dressed like a flamenco dancer is like the least threatening thing I can imagine, sexually speaking. Also, that is so gross. Also, if you think that is the scariest thing you can say to Amy Pond, you don't get her. (Also, why go there at all? What is the point of that? Is this a Doctor-reversion thing, like the Master always hitting his wife?) "The Doctor knows you, but he's not telling me who you are. And he always does. Takes him a while sometimes, but he tells me. So you're something different."

The DL tells her she'll never be the one the Doctor truly trusts, or else he would tell her his name. Which is just ugly, dude. Amy can't be expected to know what a big deal that was. It's almost like the DL is purposefully trying to drive Amy away from the Doctor, wouldn't you say?

Her faith is unshakeable. The DL points down at the two of them: "You ran away with a handsome hero. Would you really give him up for a bumbling country doctor who thinks the only thing he needs to be interesting is a ponytail? ...Maybe it's better than loving and losing the Doctor. Pick a world and this nightmare will all be over. They'll listen to you. It's you they're waiting for. Amy's men. Amy's choice."

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Which, again, means at least three things, which is why you have to watch this episode at least twice just because of the way it's constructed. Because there's a level where this episode is a hamfisted metaphor for a romantic rivalry that shouldn't even exist. Then there's the level where the men are equal to the places are equal to the lives, and she needs to choose between them. I find that one a little hamfisted too, just because it exists entirely on the plane that says getting married makes you an adult -- but also cannot really be true, because we're only halfway through the season and thus we know for sure that Upper Leadworth is a dream.

But then on your next time through, knowing what you know, you can see that the DL is being just about as selfless and as beautiful as he ever could be. Everything means its opposite. To call the Doctor a "handsome hero" is to indict Amy on charges of which she knows she isn't, but still fears she is, guilty. And running down Rory like that just gets her dander up. What seems to be a leveraged choice actually pushes her the other way, which is what the DL has been trying to do the whole time. Take one impossible option and the other impossible option and trap her between them: She'll have no choice but to turn into something else. Learn that in either world, it's more important to the Doctor that Amy have a choice at all. That he's willing to open himself up to unimaginable pain in order to help heal what he has broken.

The Doctor herds everybody into the church and then heads for Rory and Amy's place. The DL appears in the van, wearing a spacesuit. "Friends? Is that the right word for the people you acquire? Friends are people you stay in touch with. Your friends never see you again once they've grown up. The old man prefers the company of the young, does he not?" The Doctor doesn't let it show, on his face.

The Doctor arrives at the house, which is littered with olds. They're raking and hoeing at the walls and the doors. Inside, Amy wakes up in Rory's arm. "I carried you. I'm afraid you may experience some bruising," he says sweetly, apologetically. When she sits up, the music swells and he takes a pair of handy scissors to his ponytail. It's totally dumb but it doesn't last long.

The Doctor appears at their feet, and Amy I guess goes into labor, and the zombies attack. "They're scared," says the Doctor. "Fear generates savagery."

Rory is hit with eyeball spray, and goes slowly to dust. "Look after our baby," he says, and he's gone. Amy goes very quiet and very still, and unmoving she whispers, "Save him. You save everyone. You always do. It's what you do." She's counting on it. She's always counted on it. He shakes his head. He keeps showing her, over and over. A few tears, down her cheek:

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"Then what is the point of you?"

The story can end now.

"This is the dream. Definitely, this one. Now, if we die here, we wake up, yeah?" Or they just die. "Either way, this is my only chance of seeing him again. This is the dream. Because if this is real life, I don't want it. I don't want it." The old folks let them pass, without attacking. Maybe because it's a dream, or maybe because they know what she is planning. The Doctor gives her the keys to the van, clasping her hand, ready to where she leads. "I didn't know... I honestly didn't, till right now. I just want him. I love Rory, and I never told him, but now he's gone."

The Doctor looks the DL in the eye, gets into the van with her. And she drives it, faster and faster, and steers into the house. And they die.

"You chose this world," the DL smiles. "Well done. You got it right. And with only seconds left!" He turns up the heat, since they've won the game. "I hope you've enjoyed your little fictions. It all came out of your imagination, so I'll leave you to ponder on that." Rory wakes, hands covered in ice, and she slowly throws her frozen self upon him. They turn their faces to the Doctor, like sunflowers, asking him what happens next.

"I'm going to blow up the TARDIS," the Doctor explains. "The Dream Lord has no power over the real world. He was offering us a choice between two dreams." And how does he know that? The Doctor steers the TARDIS into the sun, and they die.

"Any questions?" He holds out a speck of psychic pollen, from the candlemeadows of Karass don Slava. It somehow fell in the time rotor, heated up and induced the dream state. Meaning, then, that the pollen was the Dream Lord? No, of course: The Dream Lord was the Doctor. Psychic pollen feeds on what's dark inside us: "Gives it a voice, turns it against you. I'm 907, it had a lot to go on."

"But those things he said about you. You don't think any of that's true?" All of it's true. What's also true is that the darkest stuff in the Doctor is also the brightest. It's what drove the Master mad, and it's the reason he needs you. Rory realizes there's still a question, and he asks it: What happened to him, in Leadworth? He died, so Amy crashed the van. (How do you stave off the self-harm, in Upper Leadworth? You don't, apparently. Not if the option is living without your fiancé. If they think that's romantic, and not grotesque and pathetic, that's their problem.) They make out, and whatever happens next is apparently up to Amy. Amy's Choice.

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But the smirky DL winks up at the nervous Doctor, from his reflection: Amy never had a choice. Amelia made the choice a long time ago. This wasn't a story about Amy's choice, it was a story about the Doctor, and his two hearts. And judged on the merits -- even judged on the old

theology scale -- it's pretty marvelous. Either way it's up to us to cross the bridge to the world the story's actually situated.

This is a story about men, written for men, by men. We just live in it. If you want to read your own story, you already know what to do. You're already doing it now.



<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/the-hungry-earth/>

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So "Amy's Choice" was pretty good, and "Vincent" is going to be fairly awesome, and "The Lodger" is probably the best episode of this show I've ever seen, barring or perhaps equal to old Redfern and the Family of Blood. Which means things are about to get real awesome, but also means we have to slog through this effing mess first. I'll try to be nice, but honestly it's so stupid that it's offensive, and it's so offensive that it's just stupid, and between those two options I don't know which is more of a turnoff.

So come with me now to Cwmtaff, ten years hence in 2020, where apparently people are still not sick of *The Gruffalo*. Or maybe it's having a resurgence, and Spike Lee will be making an unloved and vastly underrated movie of it, starring people from HBO shows of the future. The story is about a little mouse that goes through the forest scaring off predators by pretending to be friends with the imaginary creature the Gruffalo. He's like Mark Ruffalo, but even more annoying.

At the end there's a twist because he meets the Gruffalo and he is real, but the mouse is still awesome and leads the Gruffalo through the forest and all the aforementioned predators go running off due to the Gruffalo, who is so dumb he thinks they're all afraid of the mouse, and eventually becomes afraid the mouse will eat him. (Essentially, gruffalo gruffalo gruffalo gruffalo gruffalo.)

I guess there's something to be said here about creatures preceded by their own propaganda, the way our fear leads us to do abstractly stupid things like run screaming from a tiny mouse or, in this case, threaten genocide all over the place and generally act like assholes. But the story is *itself* so reductive -- and racist, and sexist, and generally ill-devised -- and childish that it's like having a literary reference to *Goodnight Moon* show up in the middle of *Pat The Bunny*. Not too many aspiring Northrop Fries in the under-tens. Particularly not in South Wales.

Meet Elliot Northover, child, and his father Mo. They are both fairly obnoxious but we'll dispatch with them soon enough. They are struggling to read the *Gruffalo* book, but Elliot's got dyslexia -- which never stopped anybody from doing anything, not even being an annoying pint-sized twit -- and Mo... I don't know about Mo, why he struggles with the *Gruffalo* so, but I do know that he A) Married this lady Ambrose, who is just the worst as you'll see, and B) takes the book with him to work. Like for his personal enjoyment.

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Elliot's point, and it's a valid one, is that he can just listen to audiobooks rather than fight with the idea of reading, but Mo is all about persevering. Like, why give up when you can live in a valley in South Wales where nobody but your two relatives live, and stare all day at a literal hole in the literal ground. At least you're not working at Torchwood.

Mo asks Elliot, "Who loves you more than me?" And Elliot responds, "No one!" Which is unhealthy, but especially since Ambrose is standing right there. Mostly because she's a bitch and you know she's going to make much of it, but also because now she's something to prove. "How about I torture somebody to death for no reason, huh? What then?"

Mo takes his whopping 700-word tome and hops on his little bike and heads down the *cwm* and into work, which is: A drill going all the way into the earth, kept working by his father-in-law and this awesome old lady Nasreen, and between zero and fifty of some other people. What are they drilling for? We don't ever find out. From things Nasreen says, it seems like they're just drilling to drill, like for the thrill of it. That sweet loamy drill-thrill thrill of drilling.

"21 kilometers, folks! Further than anyone's ever drilled into the Earth. Thanks for your amazing work!" That's all we hear, just Nasreen congratulating everybody on yet another day of drilling. "Onwards and downwards," says Elliot's grandfather, and they're like, "How much further do you think we can we go?" Then they all congratulate each other on how they drilled really deep into the earth, and go home to rest up for another awesome day of drilling a hole tomorrow morning.

Mo settles in to savor some of the suspense -- What will happen to the mouse *this* time? -- and to watch the drill, or the hole, or something. It's his job. I guess Ambrose felt sorry for his illiterate Welsh ass and she was like, "Dad, you know that hole you're drilling? Don't you think somebody should watch it at night, lest it somehow become less deep?" And Mack the granddad was like, "Aye, but you're angling for a job for the good-for-nothing *mwnci*," and she was like, "Dad, don't start."

There's a lot of sounds suddenly and lights blinking and *whoop-whoop* and then Mo finds a hole somewhere they're not drilling, and there's strange steam coming out of it, and so he sticks his big old stupid hand in there and then the hole eats him. If only the sign saying NO TOUCHING STRANGE STEAMING HOLES had an illustration, like a hole with steam coming out and a man reaching for it and a big red circle with a slash through it. *This means you, Mo*. But I guess Wales doesn't have OSHA. Or if they do it's probably spelled all fucked up. Being dyslexic in Wales is like the worst situation, because you're already halfway there.

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TARDIS sets down and immediately the half-naked Amy and bowtied Doctor, not to mention stupid Rory, realize they are not in Rio for Carnival like they thought they were going to be. The ground feels weird to the Doctor, with a sort of mo-like texture. He hops up and down a few times and then runs off through a graveyard with patchy blue grass all through it, so Amy can notice people on the ridge opposite, waving at them. Why it's Rory and Amy, ten years hence, waving hullo! Fancy a vacation for our tenth anniversary? Yeah, I was thinking you mean so much to me that I really want to show you how much I love you... By taking you to Cardiff.

Well, I guess since they're about to have an adventure, that would be pretty sweet. Amy's surprised that they're still together in ten years (because she is a two-dimensional cardboard bitch, aka a woman) and then wants to run over and talk to future Amy and future Rory. Probably to ask them if they've seen the Doctor recently and if so, how is he doing. The Doctor rushes them away from that nightmare scenario, and drags them down the valley toward the "big mining thing."

Rory wonders about how the Doctor is so incompetent all the time, and Amy says that their doppelgangers across the way are proof that it's going to be fine, and then Rory asks how they can possibly go back to their crappy lives -- "the nurse and the kissogram" -- after all these vampires and all, and Amy doesn't care, because I guess Amy just honestly doesn't care about that. Then Rory yells at Amy for wearing her engagement ring on a ramble through the Welsh countryside, and takes it away from her.

Because as a grown woman, she cannot be expected to keep up with her own *jewelry*. If you care enough to buy the ring, but don't trust the person to hang onto the ring, what that makes you is a pedophile.

Meanwhile, over at the Big Mining Thing, the drill is shut down and there's no sign of Mo. Nobody's come in or left, and there are mysterious holes. These people love holes so damn much, I don't know why that's a problem.

Something stupid goes on with Rory where he meets Ambrose, who assumes that he is from CSI Cardiff and is there to investigate some missing coffins. It mainly serves to introduce Ambrose, who is Mo's wife, a harridan, and who runs Meals On Wheels for the entire valley. Where nobody but them lives. Some of us just call this "dinner." And I don't know what else she's up to that she needs to give herself airs and a fancy van for this, considering your job opportunities are: 1) Stare at the hole or 2) Dig the hole.

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While Amy and the Doctor break into the Big Mining Thing, Ambrose explains a sort of gross country-folk story about how her dead uncle Alun was meant to be buried with her dead aunt Gladys but when they dug her ass up, it was gone. "Body, coffin, everything." But there was no sign of disturbance on the surface, we're told by the I guess keen-eyed tracker Ambrose. Rory, being an idiot, asks her to explain that entire thing again. Ambrose, having been married to Mo for at least ten years, does so without blinking.

The ground still doesn't feel like it should, but Amy advances the theory that ten years in the future, that's what the ground feels like. I like this theory. The Doctor eats some blue grass and then spits it out again, making her giggle, and they are cute for a second. Further in, to where the random holes have begun appearing, we meet Nasreen and Mack. Everybody asks everybody who the hell they are for awhile, psychic paper, the Doctor realizes that blue grass + random holes + BMT = danger, but speaks as elliptically as possible about the reasons and qualities of this danger for a good while as everybody runs around panicking.

Seems the ground is attacking. The Doctor tells Amy not to fall in the holes. So she does.

Ten minutes of Artax and Atreyu later, the Doctor cries into his pudding for awhile and then straightens up and continues refusing to explain one single solitary thing that has happened so far, while everybody how fucking stupid they are. It's still rude and not funny, and it still does nothing to further the story.

And his opposite number, cruddy little Elliot, starts pacing around the grave where Rory is, talking all this "When you've eliminated the impossible whatever remains," bullshit of the sort unlikely precocious kids on bad TV shows are always affecting (at least Elliot references how he likes the audiobooks of Sherlock Holmes, so it's not a total waste), and basically the graves are eating people.

So the deal is that when the drill hit the 21k mark or thereabouts, it activated certain "bioprogramming" in the dirt of the valley, which made it start eating people. Egregious: "Bioprogramming! Clever. You use biosignals to resonate the internal molecular structure of natural objects!" (Oh right, *biosignals*.) Anyway, Nasreen being a Woman of Science she is not having it, but the Doctor is still having Atreyu aftershocks, so he's flummoxed. But then even though the drill is stopped, there's still drilling happening, and the Doctor cutely lays down on the ground to confirm it: There's now somebody down *there* drilling *up*. Having been warned, no doubt, by the resonance of the "internal molecular structure" of "natural objects."

The Doctor, hacking into their computers, congratulates Nasreen and Mack on their jolly big fuckin' hole, and then asks them, um, *why*. They still don't have a compelling reason. Seems they found some blue grass and some anachronistic minerals on the surface, and thought, "Big giant hole." Then he uses their computers and a lot of talking talking talking to figure out that the things drilling up are numerous transports. The Doctor tells them to gather up Ambrose and Elliot, as the only people who live here in the valley, and get out of there because in twelve minutes the gnomes are coming.

Not gnomes. I *wish*. Mack totally goes, "How can something be coming up, when there's only the Earth's crust down there?" Good question. The answer is "I won't tell you, but I will continue to make extreme demands of you and get mad if you don't fulfill them unquestioningly, for no real reason." Maybe he's worried about Amy and that's why he's being such a dick? Except that he does this to Amy all the time, also.

Anyway, Rory comes running up and says the graves are eating people, and the Doctor tells him to get inside the church with the Macks, since there's now an energy bubble all around the whole area, which consists of absolutely nothing save: Two graveyards, a house somewhere, a Big Mining Thing, and a church. Very strategic, this town. The Doctor demonstrates the bubble by pulling a slingshot out of nowhere, and it's very cute. What is cuter than a bowtied boy with a slingshot? Only in shortpants could he compete with himself right now.

Those damn gnomes. So apparently the TARDIS is useless because the bubble would screw her up, and anyway there are only nine and half minutes until gnomefall. Where's Amy? Doctor's not saying. He finally admits that she got eaten by the earth, while the TARDIS sings a little bit about it, but he assures Rory it's going to be fine. Rory sort of obliquely points out that, just like in every episode and multiple times in some cases, the Doctor has fucked up and gotten Amy in trouble. Which is not at all true: What gets Amy into her situations is invariably her retarded behavior.

The church door, sometimes it sticks, so that'll probably be a problem in a little while. You can tell because they yell, "This flaming door! Always sticking!" and "I thought you were having it fixed!" Right, because this family of four that is the only people who live here, they need to go to church all the time, where there are no services and nobody to administer them if there were. Inside, everybody takes a good five minutes to explain to the uncommonly stubborn Ambrose about how there's gnomes, and a sky bubble, and two missing people, all of which she was *there* for and is aware of, and so maybe she should pull it together and stop being a bitch for like one second. Ambrose is like, "Oh, I will not be *pulling it together*. I will be kicking it up *a notch or two*."

There's a whole thing I still don't really understand where the Doctor makes everybody gather up "every phone, every camera, every piece of recording or transmitting equipment... Every burglar alarm, every movement sensor, every security light." I am sure there's a reason for this but I still haven't figured out what he's doing or what the plan is, and I've spent literally a month trying to figure it out. Anyway, he tells Elliot that it's cool to be dyslexic, and meanwhile Ambrose is getting a whole pile of weapons together -- cricket bat, taser, axes -- and the Doctor gets *real sexy and real scary up in her face* about no weapons. Matt Smith, as usual, saves this entire episode. With Nasreen quick behind.

Oh wait, okay: "First, the sensors and cameras will tell us when something arrives. Second, if something does arrive, I use this to send a sonic pulse through that network of devices, a pulse which would temporarily incapacitate most things in the universe." So... Like a weapon, yeah? Basically?

There's an awesome moment, admittedly, where Elliot describes his wish to get the hell out of the country and into the city -- "Soon as I'm old enough, I'll be off" -- and the Doctor loves him because he was the same way. "Did you get away?" Yeah. "Do you ever miss it?" *So much*.

He's not scared of monsters, they're scared of him -- but no weapons! -- and then he lets Elliot run home to get his headphones, which is totally fine and not a problem, but you just know they're going to make a huge fucking deal about it later because the church door is going to stick and Elliot won't be able to get in and they'll be like, "That innocuous thing you did!" And he'll be like, "I am to blame. I will save your son." And he'll make that Atreyu face again, and you'll want to kiss it better. So I guess not *all* bad.

Now the bubble is turning black so it's nighttime, even as they're locking down some other part of the plan I still don't get. That was pretty scary, this bit. The door's stuck yet again, and the Doctor can't sonic it open, which Rory bitches about -- "Don't diss the sonic!" -- and they get inside and listen to the gnomes coming, and then Ambrose realizes Elliot's still outside getting his headphones, and crawls right up the Doctor's ass about it, and there's a sort of shape out in the dark graveyard running back and forth for no real reason while he's banging on the door, and it's real freaking creepy.

And then they nab him. Maybe he can lecture them about things until they send him back. Or just send Ambrose out there and she'll scare them off forever. Or commit genocide for no real reason, or something. Ambrose runs out, finds the damned headphones, and screams. The gnome, which has a scary bone face with giant black eyes and a long scary body, jumps on Ambrose and almost takes her away too, but then doesn't. Good call, she's awful. Old Mack comes lumbering up and the gnome gives him a lash of the tongue, and he's down, and then Ambrose helps him back into the church.

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Ambrose screams and yells and moans and the Doctor explains to her that they're taking people, not killing them, which means they're not killing them. I see the logic there. The Doctor promises to get Elliot back, and sends her back in the church. Also, in addition to the slingshot from nowhere the Doctor also has magical sunglasses from nowhere that see heat like the *Predator*, which this episode already is, and he figures out what the gnomes are, and smiles a secret smile, but if you think he's going to share that information with us, or anybody, you don't know Doc.

Rory and the Doctor trap the gnome with a fire extinguisher and stick her in the back of the Meals on Wheels van so her cold-blooded ass will calm down for a bit. They fist-bump and high-five and do boy things, and the Doctor explains that they have just basically equalized the hostage situation, not really solved anything. Speak of the devil, Amy's in some kind of glass coffin down under the earth. Needless to say, she screams and yells and acts so annoying that the gnomes first shush and then gas her. It's scary in there, for a moment, even though the respite from her screaming has been nice so far.

The Doctor has the gnome lady chained up, and he peels off her (extra-concealing) bone face to show her pretty lizard face, but she has no redeeming characteristics and is just disgusting, so mostly she just hisses and acts rude the whole time he's introducing himself and explaining the

situation with Amy and Mo and the other one. She does some kind of war-crimes thing where she swears she knows nothing, she's the last of her species, and he turns on all that gravitas and intensity and tells her not to insult him: "I'm the last of my species, and I know how it sits in a heart." It is way hardcore in this moment.

Okay, her name is Alaya, and she would like to genocide the "vermin" and "apes" who have taken over the earth in the last 300M years or so. They've been waiting to reclaim the planet for awhile, and once they detected the drill, which they thought was a weapon, the "warrior class was activated" and they woke up to make a big fight. The Doctor swears that there's a peace to be brokered, but she is not interested. "This land is ours. We lived here long before the apes." He tells her she doesn't have "automatic rights to it now," and they both hiss and spit, and somewhere Helen Thomas is resigning.

"The fire of war is already lit. A massacre is due... I'll gladly die for my cause. What will you sacrifice for yours?" I dunno. Amy? Ambrose's sense of self-worth? Two hours of this stupid storyline when we could have had more episodes like the ones mentioned above? Shit, we could've had two more episodes like the Venice one and I'd be happier.

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Of course, it's time for the Doctor to go below the surface to talk to the gnomes, which Nasreen finds weird, calling them "aliens," and he goes, "They're not aliens! They're Earth ... lients!" Silurians, Eocenes, *homo reptilia*: "Not monsters, not evil. Well, only as evil as you are. The previous owners of the planet, that's all. Look, from their point of view, you're the invaders. Your drill was threatening their settlement."

Ugh, I can't even go into the mindfuck of the word choices here. I'm not what you'd call a huge fan of Israel, but I do realize it's a multifaceted conflict with a history stretching back as far as persons do, and mainly what I do with that information is *not write science fiction stories about a race of snake-people, with horns, who are raised communally and gender-blind, and who want to commit genocide on the people who now live in their ancestral home.*

The Doctor gives the assemblage one of his We Could Be Heroes speeches, like Jeff with his pornographic laptop, and tells them while he's gone, under no circumstances should they torture the creature in the crypt, Alaya, to death. That's the only thing he tells them to do: "If she lives, so do Elliot and Mo and Amy. Because I will find them. While I'm gone, you four people, in this church, in this corner of planet Earth, you have to be the best of humanity." Needless to say, they are going to do terrible things to her. Mack's already onboard: "Shouldn't we be examining this creature, dissecting it, finding its weak points?" (Points off for misuse of "dissection," but you know I don't roll pedantic.) "You are decent, brilliant people. Nobody dies today. Understand?" They nod, but clearly it's not going to work out.

Wonderful Nasreen -- who like Catherine Tate before her comes from comedy, which gives her like Catherine Tate before her a tearjerking realness that lights up the screen whenever she's in frame -- decides she's coming with the Doctor, giving as her logic that since for some reason she's devoted her life to digging a bloody big hole, she will be seeing what's down there, thank you very much. Because she is worthwhile, the Doctor accepts, and basically leaves old Rory in charge. She loves the TARDIS in just the right way, not aghast or puking, but also not shrugging her off: Just loving her. "What does it do?" Everything! Before she can even touch anything, though, the gnomes get ahold of the TARDIS with their biosignals or whatever -- "They must've sensed the electromagnetic field!" and hijack her immediately. Going down?

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The leftovers of humanity go visit Alaya, and she explains to them that they are going to end up killing her, which will start the helter skelter of man-on-lizard violence, and it's going to be awesome. "I know apes better than you know yourselves. I know which one of you will kill me. Do you?" Well, I'm guessing Ambrose, since she's the only other two-dimensional bitch in this story, but also because Elliot said that Mo loved him more. But I dunno: Upstairs you also got Mack, who's dying of Alaya's tongue thing, with green veins creepily nastily down his neck. That's probably one more reason.

Downstairs, a lot further than Nasreen ever drilled, they find themselves wandering through a complex of vines and caves and things. Nasreen is impressed, and the Doctor delights in it. And off in the vivisection room, Mo is strapped in beside Amy when she wakes up. Apparently, she is now going to be vivisected, just like Mo was, and he shows her his autopsy scar, but notes that he was still conscious when this happened. I don't like the gnomes very much, I think. Although I would go with these creepy medical research experiments over dealing with Alaya pretty much instantly. Amy's day goes from bleak to terrible, as Nasreen discovers a huge civilization of lizards where the Doctor was expecting a dozen *homo reptilia* or less.

Next week: The Crack comes back and everybody misbehaves, but then luckily the language of patriarchy is universal. Then, a half-hour montage of women throughout history getting slapped for opening their fucking mouths.

<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/cold-blooda/>

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"This is the story of our planet, Earth. Of the day 1000 years past, when we came to share it with a race known as Humanity. It is the story of the Doctor who helped our races find common ground and the terrible losses he suffered. It is the story of our past, and must never be forgotten." This, from some kind of lofty future Elvenhame-type voice of a guy we'll meet in a bit, sounds great. What it means is a certain sort of framing procedure that makes all of this crap about to happen even more important. It's something RTD would do, but he would make it count: This just seems desperate. Not to mention the implied coda "...As long as no irate Jews or irrational bitches show up to ruin everything like usual."

Nasreen and the Doctor prowl the underground Silurian city, looking for Amy's warm-blooded heat anomalies; it's deserted because everybody's still asleep except the woman warriors that always cause such trouble. "Front door approach! Definitely, always the best way," the good Doctor says, right before the alarms start going off. "...Apart from the backdoor approach, that's also good. Sometimes better." That reminds me of a filthy Sarah Silverman joke I've always loved and will not be reproducing here. The soldiers come upon them after a bit of running around, and the Doctor throws up his hands, desperately trying to tell them he's cool and Nasreen's cool and everything's cool. Which would be fine, except he's gotten gasped and captured by the one segment of the one race with no redeeming characteristics whatsoever. Attend:

Green doctor-man approaching Amy with some slicing implements and tricorder-type machinery, noting that from her Rio-appropriate clothing, she seems more resistant to cold than Mo strapped in beside her. They shoot waves of science at Amy, killing her topside bacteria or whatever, so he can start dissecting, i.e. vivisecting. (Which we learned last week, also from being alive, is a shitty thing to do -- but won't stop the Doctor from tongue-kissing this doctor-lizard later, for reasons that still escape me.) An alarm reaches the lab, asking him to come identify the Doctor and Nasreen in scientific terms, but first Amy picks his pocket of a scientific device that will of course set her and Mo free.

"You never picked a lizard man's pocket?" she giggles at Mo, who is shocked at her Mary Sue powers as people often are before they realize she's just a walking mouth full of nothing cool. They take off down the corridors, Mo wondering if that thing was an alien, will they come back, et cetera. Amy has no idea, but she knows they need to find the Doctor and get some explanations. Down one hallway, they find Elliot in a freaky space tube, unconscious and staring, with wires and tubes and the like coming out of him. (Chilling, but especially after *Torchwood*.)

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Mo wants in there with Elliot, but after trying a bit, Amy points out that he's clearly doing fine, and is even getting monitored by the machines, so let's forget it until later. Mo suggests finding some weapons and threatening lizards until they get Elliot out, and Amy is willing to table that idea until they find out, you know, what's actually happening. Oh, humans: Always coming in guns blazing when their children are kidnapped and they've been tortured and almost vivisected. It's almost like it's a meaningful comment on society or some shit. Or it would be, if the decks weren't totally stacked by the shittiness of the Silurian jerks.

Upstairs, Ambrose is hanging out at the graveyard, as one does. She has decided to be pissed at Rory for letting her think he was the police. Instead of pointing out that she was a moron to think that, he just submits to her barrage of useless questions -- Who is Rory, who is the Doctor, what is happening, why -- he just promises the Doctor will fix it and tells her to go back to guarding lizard lady Alaya. "I promise you, Ambrose. I'd trust the Doctor with my life. We stick to his plan. We keep that creature safe." Oh, son! No way is Ambrose letting that chick out of here alive, not when there's the chance of screwing things up six or seven ways without even really trying that hard.

Alaya's sister is Restac, played by the same actress, and they're just about as awful as each other. Locked in a decontamination chamber, the Doctor literally goes, "Argh!" while Restac makes her point, as to the escape of Amy and Mo, that the military does everything better than everybody else, and obviously should be in charge of everything. The doctor-man points this out, but reminds her that technically they are ranked the same -- and since he's male, it goes without saying, he's a little more "same" than she is.

Restac submits angrily, and he asks about her sister, noting compassionately that it's okay to show concern since they're of the same "gene-chain." Then he starts decontaminating the Doctor and Nasreen using the same science waves as a moment ago, causing the Doctor to start screaming, since he's not human and thus has a whole bunch of unrecognizable shit going on that the decon will probably really mess with.

Alaya faces up toward the window in her dungeon, opening her eyes and almost smiling as old Mack approaches. He's not looking too great, but she's surprised he's still standing at all, given the venom she tongued him with earlier, and begs to see the wound. "How does it feel, ape?" she asks, and he admits it feels kind of horrible. He offers to effect a secret trade for some kind of antidote or something -- bonus points for pronouncing escape *excape* -- and she laughs at him: "You see? You beg, and offer betrayal, so early!" And if this were any other season, or even the Venice episode, there would be at least honor here: Her hardcoreness would be respectable in some way, instead of just being a shitty thing among many shitty things about her. But in this story, you're lucky to have a single facet: "Why would I want to escape when I can watch you die? The first ape death of the coming war!" She turns back to the window and he's like, damn.

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Doctor guy is like, "Don't worry, Doctor, I'm only neutralizing your ape bacteria, the hideous torture and experimentation comes later," and the Doctor calls his attention to the fact that he is clearly not human, and is about to die. Restac is not having that, and tells the doctor to keep going, but he stops. The Doctor goes right back to being adorable. "Oh, that's much better, thanks! Not got any celery, have you?" (Zing!) He makes a joke about the climate down there being better for tomatoes, and then introduces himself and Nasreen, who wakes up and woozily exclaims, "Oh, a green man!"

The Doctor's friendly with Restac, which is a lost cause, and he's a bit disheartened to find out she's a military commander: "Really? There's always a military, isn't there." They discuss how the drill seemed like a weapon, "attacking the oxygen pockets" upstairs in the earth, and the Doctor is first impressed with their science but then worried by the whole drill thing: Finally, the answer to Alaya's initial aggression.

Restac asks for/demands info on the rest of their "invasion force," and he's just lovely saying it's only him and "lovely Nasreen," looking around for the folks they kidnapped. And, of course, to offer Alaya's safe return, as a closer look reveals their sisterhood: "Of course you're worried, but

don't be, she's safe." Restac points out the very good point that it's sort of crummy to say you come in peace and then immediately take hostages, but the Doctor tries to explain that's not the deal. What is the deal? Restac does not give a fig. "I don't negotiate with apes. I'm going to send a clear message to those on the surface: Your execution."

And again, Restac could be totally cool, because you can see her point: She's been woken up from a very long sleep because something is threatening them -- something that, even if the Doctor explained it, would still make little damn sense, because "a jolly big hole" is not actually a scientific pursuit -- and now they've got her sister and they're making all these demands without proving anything other than what she's been led to presume, which is a war. But instead, it's a one-sided conflict between nice little white families and a bunch of unfeeling monstrous invaders whose technical claim to the land is never more than provisionally granted in order to make this whole grody story work without actually resolving anything.

Meanwhile, Amy and Mo have found some very scary other chambers -- this is like every childhood memory I have, of this show and like *The Third Eye*, in one very cheap set, with the spotlight shining down -- containing suited-up Silurians still in stasis. Terrifyingly, they crack a couple open and sort of mannequin their way around in there, hoping not to wake them. Amy somehow figures out that they are standing on "some sort of powered transport discs," and offers to take Mo home to find the Doctor, who's presumably still upstairs crying over a hole.

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Good thinking, but since Elliot's still in play, Mo's more interested in grabbing their guns and taking the entire lizard complex in hand. I guess when your kids on the line you're allowed to get totally stupid, but there's a whole thing about "weapons" that's particularly egregious in this story, so it also makes Mo seem tainted by the same unworthiness as Ambrose that he wants a gun, even though he'll not get a single condescending speech about it at any point. Amy grabs a gun, same deal. They head down a corridor, only to find Clone Wars amounts of lady-soldiers standing in a quickly-brightening horror hangar. Back to Plan D. For Doctor.

Ambrose finally notices that her dad is going green, both figuratively and literally, as the nasty mutant veins continue from his neck down his chest. She is grossed out, but immediately goes into action, cooling him down and giving him a place to rest, while his teeth chatter and he feels all weird. (See, and Ambrose could be totally cool if... You know the rest.)

Getting marched from somewhere to somewhere, by a few regular actors and most of them extras in fake boobs and bone faces, the Doctor explains to Nasreen that everybody else is in hibernation, and explains their whole backstory: "Their astronomers predicted a planet heading to Earth, on a crash course. They built a life underground and put themselves to sleep for millennia in order to avert what they thought was the apocalypse. When in reality, it was the moon, coming into alignment with the Earth."

Everybody stops and wonders how he knows that part of the story, and he admits he's run into similar-but-different pockets of Silurians before. They get all happy for a second, sweetly, but then the Doctor crushes their hopes by explaining that they were attacked and killed by humanity. I know sugarcoating's not his specialty, but *come on*. Find a better way. Of course, Restac is gloaty about that one, because it's just more context for what she already knows: Apes are truly a "vermin race." Even Nasreen is like, Nice one.

Ambrose comes downstairs -- now that Alaya has taken all three of her men away -- and threatens her with a taser unless she cures Mack. Alaya is, of course, *delighted* by this turn of events, because she's not a person, she's just a viewpoint, so the idea of getting tortured to

death *just to prove a point* doesn't make the radical not-sense that it normally would. And again, Ambrose is being pretty rational: "First you take my son, now you hurt my dad. I'm just protecting my family here. That's all. I don't want to use it. I want you to put things right."

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Which, maybe it's from being American, but that speech alone doesn't seem like a bad thing. If it were just this one Alaya and they had her tied up, you might offer to tase her if you thought it would help. But no, weapons are bad if you're a woman (but not if you're Mo), and interrogation is bad if you're a woman (but not if you're a lizard scientist man), so her completely rational train of thought is just indicative of how disgusting she really is.

Luckily we have Alaya, who makes no goddamn sense whatsoever, goading her into doing it: "Use it. Use it on me! You're too afraid! A woman who can't even protect her own child!" Ambrose finally tases the shit out of her -- once she's walked her lizard ass right up in Ambrose's face, note -- and then immediately apologizes at length, asking again for the cure for Mack. (Still not really doing anything wrong, considering how horrible Alaya is being.) "He's vermin! He deserves a painful death!" Ambrose begs her to stop being a bitch for like two seconds, but no, Alaya is not having it. She even points out that she called this one last week: "I knew it would be you! The one with the most to lose. The weakest!" At this point, Ambrose sort of loses it and kills her, but because neither of their characters make sense at all, it's up to the rest of the characters and the episode to explain to us how A) That all made sense and B) Ambrose is a bitch who deserves death.

Rory's bitching at Mack for not telling him, a nurse, that he was getting green mutations, and then they hear the horrible death screams of Alaya and run down there. "We have to be better than this!" he screams at his daughter, which nobody would ever say, and Ambrose protests once again that she honestly thought even Alaya's brainless awfulness had a limit, and she would have stopped once Alaya gave in. Which is clearly and obviously true, and sort of the point. Because now that you're bitching about it, what you're really saying is that *you burnt our bargaining chip*, which is I think in some ways worse. Alaya had no intrinsic value as a living being because she was *choosing not to act like a living being*, at which point you can do whatever you want with her in my opinion. I don't like zealots and I don't like terrorists, and insofar as she had any sort of personality I guess she was both. Now she's dead, so fuck it.

But either way, it's not really Ambrose's problem, because it was a mistake. She became more and more human the longer Alaya talked, and I don't mean that in the cynical nasty way this show so often does: If they'd made it all about her anger, it *would* be her fault, but the actress is so good and her lines were so specifically rational that the whole thing falls apart, and you've just got everybody taking turns getting on the high horse about it. Which, hilariously, is exactly what's going to happen downstairs too: One woman takes it too far and becomes emblematic of everything wrong with her race, while a bunch of weak men bitch and complain and tell her how awful she is, without doing a damn thing to fix the problem.

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Anyway, Rory's begging Alaya to tell him how to fix her, and she gets all messianic about how she's glad to die because helter skelter, and he tries a limp Doctor impression -- "You're not dying. I'm not going to let you, not today!" -- that falls flat because he's not the Doctor, and even the Doctor sounds like a twat half the time when he does that crap. Girlfriend groans out her last breath and everybody stares at Ambrose realizing she just killed Earth. And it sucks because you can't even be happy Alaya finally died, because you got Restac downstairs being twice as annoying without being scary or cool at all.

So she's decided to put the Doctor and Nasreen on trial, meaning she's decided to kill them, while everybody else is asleep. The only one awake that isn't part of the all-girl bitch militia is the science guy ("Malohkeh," which is just so annoying, even with "Restac" beside it), but once Amy and Mo show up with their guns and are immediately disarmed (without anything but grinning approval from the formerly anti-gun lobbyist the Doctor) she says it's a military matter and he needs to get the fuck. He whines about how she's lost the way, blah blah, and after a bit of dominance-clarifying hisses, goes off to tattle to daddy, while the Doctor and Amy act cute about her failed rescue *and* the wonderful lizard-men.

"I didn't know it would go like that, Dad," says Ambrose, who now that she's been narratively cast into hell has become the queen of understatement. Mack hems and haws about how repulsive and ignorantly immoral his daughter is, and then randomly one of the fifty TVs the Doctor piled in the church last week pops on. It's Restac, asking for their leader. Now, I would say -- given first blood -- that should go to Ambrose, but since it's this show and Rory is the most able-bodied male, it goes to him by tacit vote. Ambrose covers up the dead lady, and Mack tells Rory not to squeal.

"I speak for the... Humans. Some of us, anyway." He admits he doesn't have a real great handle on what the lizards are all about -- and once again lets a moderately funny line fall flat -- but they don't care, and Restac shows him Amy and the other hostages. Mo yells that he's found Elliot, and Amy is a bitch to Rory for showing any concern at all -- "What, because I was sucked into the ground? You're so clingy" -- which normally wouldn't be a problem but it's hard not to see patterns when every single thing she says to him is like this.\*

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(Which is, I guess, analogous to the Doctor telling everybody to shut up all the time, and it's occurred to me lately maybe this is a transatlantic problem I'm having, and maybe all this rudeness is just that natural British way of expressing oneself that strikes American ears as incredibly coarse and childish. Nine times out of ten, if the American has any social clue at all, Brits come off about as polite and sensitive as Gregory [House](#). Not really a question of quality or character, or an indictment either way -- because really, Americans are just ruder in general -- just a comparison to the way we speak to our families, versus a boss or a friends: A mode not of intent or malice, but simply of tone and word choice.)

Everybody says hi to everybody else, and Restac immediately demands to see her sister. As the Doctor figures out there's a problem, and tells Ambrose to let the men handle it, and Ambrose gets right up in there and yells at Restac to go fuck herself, for no real reason except I guess guilt or something. She cuts off all negotiation and simply demands her family back, and of course Restac responds by ordering Amy's execution. There's some kind of standoff for some reason, even though nothing is really stopping the soldiers from shooting her ass, but I guess everybody yelling is enough reason not to open fire, but instead stand around in your bone faces awkwardly not shooting the gun you've got pointed at the person you've just been ordered to shoot, for about a million years.

Luckily, Daddy comes home right then. Science Guy went and woke him up the second Restac told him to suck it, so he put on his finest dress and came on out to yell at her in an annoyed patrician tone. His name is Eldane, and he is in charge of you. "You're our protector, not our commander," he says, accusing her of starting a war while everybody's asleep. She claims not to recognize his authority "at this time," and he suggests she shoot him. Which I guess is the right thing to do, assuming all other things are equal. Because that always works out. Restac yells at Science for undermining her, and he says for no reason, "We're not monsters, and neither are they."



Which is such bullshit, because you're more of a monster than either of those awful sisters, because you are a torturer and medical experimenter, but we've forgotten all that in favor of a rising soundtrack and the dulcet tones of a woman being put in her place. "What is it about apes you love so much?" *Cutting them up while they're still alive and screaming, mainly.* He promises her that the humans have evolved, over the centuries, and she points out they've also polluted the planet. Then Eldane literally goes, "Shush now, Restac. Go and play soldiers. I'll let you know if I need you." I would totally have shot him just for being a dink. Look, I'm not trying to win a feminist award or anything: I'm just mentioning it every time it happens. It just so happens that it happens about three times in every scene, which results in me bringing it up a whole fucking lot.

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Reslac goes off to disobey orders some more, and everybody runs around topside trying to get downstairs. The Doctor tells them to go to the steamy holes in the drilling rig, and bring down Alaya when the pods show up. As he's done every week, he promises them it's all going to work out, and signs off. Rory, Ambrose and Mack are like, "This is going to be so totally fucked up." But Rory -- who has no characteristics, much like his girlfriend, that weren't put there by a given story's plot (especially this week, as we'll see) -- gets all manner of honorable: "We have to return her. They deserve at least that."

At this point, the ethics of the episode are so topsy-turvy (because they could never support themselves but must pretend to cohesion given the story's actual aim, which is essentially to call bullshit on both Israel and women's suffrage as a matter of children's entertainment) that he's right: That's the only sensible thing they can do, even though it's going to start the war just like she wanted. Oh, Rory. Such a blank slate until the last second, when suddenly you're Aslan. Character development's never been so easy! (Why, I can't imagine why you're being such a huge fucking saint, all of a sudden, throughout this entire episode. Can't imagine.)

Then it gets insufferable and interminable in all-new amounts, as the Doctor sits down Nasreen and Amy with Eldane in order to negotiate the West Ba... I mean, the settlement of Earth. He manages to combine the idiotic We Could Be Heroes thing with the Best Of Humanity thing and the Who Has More Fun Than Us Time-Travelers thing, then winds the whole thing up -- this is impressive -- by applying the Some Events Are Fixed But This One Is Coincidentally A Pivot Point Where If You're Just Magnificent Enough Everybody Could Be Living Where The Streets Are Paved With Cheese For The Rest Of Eternity.

It's like a monkey read five RTD scripts and then got ahold of a typewriter. Why not just tell Amy she's The Most Specialest Person In All Of Existence, for good measure? I think that would be all of them, and it's not like it has to make any kind of sense at all. Just chuck it in, throw some twee music on top, nobody will care that it's so "heartwarming" -- without the "heart" or the "warming" -- that you're basically once again being called a jerk by the show.

The upstairs crew get ready to head downstairs, but first Ambrose just has to do one thing, be right back. Is it a horrible thing? Yes. (Is it also a wise thing? Yes, given that they have no reason to trust the menfolk who've ousted those stupid women that were in charge before.) She gets Mack to do it, after begging several times and finally resorting to emotional blackmail: "If you won't do it for me, do it for Elliot. I know I did wrong. But I can't lose him, Dad!" Moms: Always protecting their kids and fucking everything up and getting vampires raped, when they're not committing suicide over their dead boyfriends.

Science Man takes them to Elliot, explaining that he doesn't vivisect them, just store them: "I took samples of the young, slowed their lifecycles to a millionth of their normal rate. So I could study how they grew, what they needed, how they lived on the surface." Awake, with his family, through millennia, and then for the last 300 years, just him. For some reason this causes the Doctor to just fall in love with him, but I've been trying to figure out why forever and I still have no idea. It's just stupid and shitty: "I've been kidnapping people for thousands and thousands of years and cutting them open while they screamed -- but the kids I just put in a dreamless death state and stared at them while their bereft parents wondered where their children had gone." *That is adorable!*

Mo wakes up Elliot and explains how they're in the center of the Earth and there are lizard men, and the Doctor needlessly apologizes for letting him go get his headphones that one time, which Elliot gracefully and needlessly forgives, and everybody heads back to the dining room-slash-execution room-slash-tribunal kangaroo court room. They leave Science Guy back there for some reason, I guess in inverse parallel to Mack setting up the drill to come fuck with us later, as he notes the soldiers being woken up and goes down there to give Restac more grief.

Eldane says they've been waiting forever to return to their rightful place, that's like their whole point the last few thou, and Nasreen points out we're already over population up here, so why add another species? Amy's so bored she's nearly asleep. And in case you didn't understand what was going on, more dumb voiceover speechifying: "As I sat there that day across the table from the humans," he says, sitting across the table from some humans, "The future of both species and of our beloved planet Earth rested in our hands," he says, as they discuss the future of both species and Earth. "But as the discussions went on," he says, as they go on, "I began to despair about whether we would ever find any common ground," he says, as they pantomime an inability to find common ground.

"As ambassadors for our species, we all had too much to lose," says Eldane, and suddenly Amy perks up and sidebars with Nasreen, finally pointing out the shittiest possible areas of Earth: The outback, the Sahara, whatever. Nasreen is worried about them breeding. "And anyway, what benefit does humanity get? And how would we ever sell this to people on the surface?" The first question is uncool, but seen as part of the second question, it makes more sense. Eldane is also sort of rude: "If I could get a word in, maybe I could tell you. You give us space, we can bring new sources of energy, new methods of water supply, new medicines, scientific advances. We were a great civilization. You provide a place for us on the surface, we'll give you knowledge and technology beyond humanity's dreams." They all hug and dance around and say shit like "Now I'm starting to see it!" and "More similarities than differences!"

While Rory and the others are arriving, Science Guy finds Restac, who is waking up all kinds of miniskirted woman-warrior lizards and has no time for his shit: "You're a good scientist, Malohkeh. But this is war." Dead.

Mack enters with Alaya's body in his arms, and the Doctor freaks out. Eldane's none too chuffed either. Ambrose takes responsibility for the lizards laughter, and Elliot shoves her away like she's diseased and everybody looks at her like she's disgusting some more and can't look her in the eye. The Doctor promises Eldane that they're better than this, sometimes or usually, and Ambrose is yelling, "This is our planet!" Stop helping, Ambrose. He gets in her face and tells her

that in the future, she should just go ahead and tell people there was a chance, but she was "so much less than the best of humanity."

Restac comes in with her ladies, and immediately drops to her knees over Alaya, moaning in a very sad, sad way. Even Ambrose feels sort of awful. The Doctor tries to explain Ambrose was just scared for her family, and swears there's "a whole race of dazzling, peaceful human beings up there." He almost starts crying, he's so disappointed, and it's really sad. You could almost care. Luckily, here's Ambrose once again fucking everything up: The drill's set to start back down in a few minutes. There's a huge firefight and everybody takes off running for the pods -- but like, they are WAY further down than 21K, yes? Established. And they were pleasantly surprised to get even that far, yes? Now, I realize "center of the earth" is an idiomatic phrase, but... Doesn't that make the drill more of a Fuck You and less of a real threat? Is all this running about still necessary?

Running, running, Doctor blowing up their guns with the sonic and pretending it's a powerful destructive weapon, more running, the Doctor figures out that Mack has green mutant gnome disease and decides to take him to Science Guy's lab to decontaminate him, Eldane might be able to do that I guess, and then how do they get out? Oh, by blowing up the entire Big Mining Thing, somehow very scientific. Lots of discussing the made-up logistics of the made-up place, how to get up to the surface while blowing up the surface while avoiding the army that is everywhere, Eldane decides to set off an emergency failsafe "meant to protect my species from infection" that involves gassing everybody who's not in a sleep chamber. Basically, the miniskirted millions get one warning, and then they get toxic gassed. And they deserve it, he says explicitly, for following Restac in the first place.

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So if the world isn't ready for lizards -- which is already a depressing resolution that makes this entire two hours pretty much hopeless ("Any chance of peace? No? Fuck it") -- then here's the compromise. In a story with the balls to say, "I have the answer to Palestine," this is what we're going with: Wait a thousand years, and then come back up. Surely by how Elliot (?) will have gotten everybody ready through the power of "legend, or prophesy, or religion," that *lizard people are coming up from the earth in 3020 and are going to need a place to stay*. As though this were not annoying -- not to say "shockingly retarded" -- enough, you got Elliot nodding his insufferable horrible little head going, "Yeah. I get you."

Absolutely the most horrible part of the entire two-hours. "Yeah, I get you." Like he's the only one capable of really "getting" that idiotic plan, don't worry he'll convince the adults and the entirety of earth about this plan, with a sort of sly eye-narrowing complicity of spirit that is just so grotesquely... I wish I had a drill so I could go inside my TV and slap the living shit out of that kid. Awful.

More science talk and running around, and but then there's another problem, because Mack still isn't decontaminated from the mutant virus. Granddad makes peace with the idea of sleeping with lizards for a thousand years, but only after a few more potshots at Ambrose -- "You mustn't blame her, she only did what she thought was right" -- and then randomly Nasreen decides to stay with him. Since they are blowing up her jolly big hole and thus she has nothing to live for. At least that's what I *hoped* she meant, but then she goes, "I've got what I was digging for. I can't leave when I've only just found it!" And I do believe what she means is heterosexual coitus with one mutated Tony Mack, I do honestly believe that's what we're supposed to take away from this. "It doesn't matter that you're locking me in stasis for a thousand years or just blew up my life's work, because I found LOVE."

Anyway, they say to come look for them in a thousand years, which for a time traveler you could do, really, any time -- not that I'm asking for this to be a three-parter -- and the voiceover of Eldane tells us, once again, what just happened: "So, the Doctor sent our warriors back to their rest on the promise of future harmony with humans."

The Doctor sends Ambrose up to the TARDIS sickbay and gets Elliot and Mo all strapped in, but then suddenly the Crack appears. Quick flash-by of every single time the Crack has ever appeared on the show, just in case you forgot how they do that every week and may have forgotten that *there is an arc to this whole season, just like a grownup would write*, and finally the Doctor gets so bored of the Crack, and angry at the Weeping Angels and Patient Zero for laughing at him about it, as well as every other bad guy, that he, um... Sticks his hand in the Crack.

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Rory points out that putting his hand in the Crack is a stupid-to-terrible idea, but apparently that's actually a stupid thing to say -- Thanks, the script, for informing us that you make sense! -- and he says where there's an explosion, there's shrapnel, and pulls something out. Great, get in the fucking TARDIS. Nope, here comes Restac, who is literally I guess *too much of a bitch to die* showing up still coughing from the toxic gas, crawling on her elbows solely by the power of what an asshole she is, and then shoots at the Doctor, but of course Rory jumps in front of him. What. A. Hero. "We were on the hill! I can't die here," he says, which is touching, but then his last words are, "You're so beautiful. I'm sorry."

Suddenly tendrils of light come out of the Crack to remove Rory from the entirety of time and history, and Amy just loses all sense in her tiny clothes, but apparently they can't do anything because "the light's already around him" and the Doctor drags him into the TARDIS so she doesn't get Cracked also, and I mean, let's just make up some rules, shall we? If his body's absorbed by the light, she'll forget him and he'll never have existed. Okay. The tendrils are new, but technically we weren't there when the soldiers got taken. But this?

"Keep him in your mind. Don't forget him. If you forget him, you'll lose him forever." Okay, that's new. But what about Octavian's Clerics? The Doctor said she remembered them because she's a time traveler. Nope, that's different because they "weren't part of [her] world," and now this is "[her] own history changing." Okay, so apparently if she just *thinks really hard* -- which honestly is more of a theme in this season than the Crack itself, and something worth I think keeping in mind -- she can keep his dead ass at least having existed, before he died. It's pretty awesome as its own little scene, but consists of so much made-up mythology -- and touches the Donna stuff at about seven different points of tangent -- that it's hard to really get lost in. Anyway, she's doing okay, until the TARDIS randomly jerks around and they fall to the floor.

"What were you saying?" she says brightly, and I can't tell if he remembers Rory or not, but when he stands up the box with their engagement ring is no longer on the floor between them, so you tell me. Back up to the ridge to watch the Big Mining Thing blow up, and then the Doctor gives Ambrose one more shitty speech about what an asshole she is, but I am exhausted from this one and I don't want to do it anymore. Suffice to say that we hope her son learns from her example to be a better person. Although having met Elliot, that seems rather unlikely, as I have ended up liking Ambrose more than anybody else at this point. She was willing to damn herself to save her family, but that's not why I love her. I love her because she needs to be loved. The rest just need a fucking slap.

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For a second Amy could have seen someone standing with her, on the hill across the way, but no. She was alone. Onward to Rio; and the shrapnel? A piece of the TARDIS, blackened and broken.

Next week: Vincent Van Gogh. It's pretty beautiful, and pretty much totally manipulative, but I will try not to *Juno* it, as being in the right frame of mind makes it amazing. And plus, it means you're only a week away from "The Lodger."

## TWOP | Doctor Who Recaps S5E10 – The Long Life of Vincent Van Gogh

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It's a sunny day in Auvers and Something's moving through the corn, but we don't know what it is yet. Vincent sits in his funny French straw hat and paints the crows as they take flight.

2010, Musée d'Orsay, and Bill Nighy the Art History Gighy is explaining in his patrician accent about how the thing with the crows is one of van Gogh's last paintings. "Those final months of his life were probably the most astonishing artistic outpouring in history. It was like Shakespeare knocking off *Othello*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear* over the summer hols." Pause, wait for laughter. The docent reminds us that he did all of this without "hope of praise or reward," because he was an ignored genius in his time. Also crazy, which carries a stigma generally.

Just ask Amy and the Doctor, two individuals who could give Vince a run for his money in the crazy department. The Doctor, we're stipulating and for once we haven't determined this for ourselves, is feeling bad about getting her fiancé vanished from all time and space, so he decided to give her something special, a hop across the Channel in her own time, to see art. I mean, if Amy had any sort of actual personality we could say she was an artist, or at least crafty. "You're being so nice to me. Why are you being so nice to me?" she asks. It's very sad. This business of Amy is very sad.

She says it's suspicious: He's taken her to Arcadia and to the Trojan Gardens, and now this: Home, or something like it, to see beautiful earthly familiar things. I mean, she's never been to the Musée d'Orsay so it's sort of special, but it's not time-and-space special, which is exactly what the Doctor should be doing for her right now. He promises there's nothing to be suspicious about, and his tone is so intense that she realizes they're not joking. But then why he's being so nice to her?

Bill Nighy discusses van Gogh as "possibly the greatest artist of all time," which seems to be the line this episode is taking, which seems like a silly claim to make about anybody, ever, but if you look at this episode as the "Unicorn & The Wasp" of this season I suppose it makes more sense. It's called "Vincent & The Doctor" but only because this is a story by men, for men: It's really a story about Amy, just like Agatha was a story about Donna we didn't know yet. *Why are you being so nice to me?*

The Doctor is a mad old wizard who takes the sine waves of Vincent's existence and instead of riding them, like we do, or evening them out with drugs, like Vincent could have, does both at once. Two hearts, one for sorrow and one for joy. We've only got the one. Amy's only got one:

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Vincent is haunted by realities he can't access, has a mind of untrammelled majesty that nobody else quite understands; his mind is affected by time and space in a way nobody else -- even people with his same problems -- can ever directly access. He is a good man, with a place in his life for love, but with so many integral struts and balances missing inside that only genius and sorrow can really make it up. He's got a hole in himself that he doesn't know the name of.

Some little kids call out about "the doctor," but they're talking about the one who cared for Vincent when he went mad. The Doctor smiles at himself, and Amy drags him to another one, a church in Auvers. They look closer, thrilled -- "You can almost feel his hand... Carving the colors



into shapes..." -- but notice a very scary animal in the window of the church. It's a big scary rooster-type animal, apparently also evil. "I know evil when I see it," the Doctor says, "And I see it in that window."

The Doctor flirts Bill Nighy into within an inch of his life, they giggle at each other about their bowties and Bill confirms that the church painting was done "probably somewhere between the first and third of June, 1890." Less than a year before his suicide. So the Doctor drags Amy off to just before Vincent's suicide. To save his life.

At one of those adorable patio'd bistros I'm given to understand are all that really goes on in France, the people are so not into helping them find Vincent, because Vincent is crazy and annoying and a drunk. The Doctor immediately offers to buy drunk poor Vincent a drink, and Vincent is mean to him because of the total gayness of that, but then Amy gets all feisty and yells at everybody and buys a bottle of wine and flirts with Vincent while the Doctor grins at them and thinks about Rory.

Hilariously, they get around the (wonderful) actor's brogue with some really cute TARDIS-translatory joke about how since they're all speaking French, and Amy's Scottish, the assumption is that they're both from Holland, which is how the real Vincent would talk. I like that. Vincent is suspicious of the Doctor, because his brother's always sending him doctors, but they change the subject to how much Amy likes Vincent's art. Which she's never seen. Awkward. Imagine if somebody loved you and you didn't understand why. It would sound like a lie.

They change the subject again to how Amy must not know much of art if she likes his art, because he doesn't believe in himself and that sort of thing. Then they change the subject one last time, to flirting with each other in a very sexy way while the Doctor gets more and more uncomfortable. Finally we talk about the churches and whatever, Vincent's been thinking about painting it, and but then one of the rude bistro lady's daughters gets gored by an invisible rooster creature, which causes the first of this episode's few false notes, which is somehow this situation results in the three of them having to run this gauntlet of mean townspeople from central casting who yell and spit and I don't know, throw rocks. Mental illness, you see, there is a stigma.

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While the character and the actor are spot on, there's a negative space around the character that is very show-don't-telly, like, I don't think very many village drunks engage in conversation about how they're the village drunk, okay, but Vincent can't wait to talk about how this is the case, with anybody who will listen. Anyway, Vincent asks where Amy and the Doctor are staying, which the Doctor adorably turns into an invitation, and then we're at Vincent's house.

"Dark night, very starry," the Doctor mugs, which is something they always do on this show to make us feel smart and hilarious, so I'm not going to whine about it. Amy talks a great deal about how much she loves his art, which is scattered all around the place and of which he is not taking very good care. The Doctor also. He thanks them for their kindness but he doesn't really hear it. The Doctor keeps pressing him about the church, but I think he just honestly isn't that interested because he's not there yet. The invisible rooster creature is not a part of that particular moment in his life, it's his life all the time, and he's got a million plans and schemes burning all the time, so why this one thing? (Also, dear This Season: What is it with you and churches?)

Vincent begins ramping up to a serious manic episode at this point. I think if I was a little kid, or I guess if I were a little kid with a very different childhood, I would find this all very funny or

deep or something, but honestly it just scared the shit out of me. This is totally the scariest part of the entire episode, not only because mania is automatically upsetting, but also because you know what's going to happen next. There's a double-dutch jump, sort of revolving-door moment, in this cycle where you see beauty and hope through the spinning, and then it goes away again.

I think probably hope is the worst part of this particular kind of story. There are readings of the myth of Pandora that say Hope is left not because of the grace of the Gods, but because it's the cruelest thing. The worst of the horrors inside. Without dreams there wouldn't be despair, right? If you didn't have hope, nothing could touch you.

"It seems to me there's so much more to the world than the average eye is allowed to see. I believe, if you look hard, there are more wonders in this universe than you could ever have dreamed of," Vincent rattles, and the Doctor wiggles his eyebrows at Amy. Not so cute hours later, with the fires burning down and Vincent tossing his arms and legs around as he whirls across the room, talking faster and higher and louder: "It's color! Color, that holds the key! I can hear the colors! Listen to them. [*The Doctor, adorably, attempts to listen to them. The Doctor, unsurprisingly, has a high tolerance for this shit.*] Every time I step outside, I feel nature is shouting at me. *Come on. Come and get me. Come on. Come on! Capture my mystery!*"

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The Doctor peels Vincent off himself and decides maybe Vincent needs some chamomile; outside, Amy is attacked by something and goes screaming. The Doctor, very scared, runs out and finds her having been hit from behind by something or another. Just as they're getting her set to rights, Vincent starts fighting something invisible. The Doctor and Amy -- which is odd, because they totally know there's an invisible monster roaming the streets, and they are here to find a giant rooster monster, and they know it's connected to Vincent -- are very social-workery about Vincent's invisible-monster fighting, like, "He's having some kind of fit" and "I'll try to calm him down" are some things they say. Rather than, say, "Guess there's an invisible monster. How intriguing."

The invisible monster smacks the Doctor with its giant tail, and then the Doctor helps Vincent fight the monster, which means generally that the Doctor gets knocked around several times while cutely swinging a stick at nothing in particular. Vincent chases the monster away, and the Doctor continues fighting windmills for a bit, and then back inside Vincent paints over a very famous canvas of some kind -- Amy nearly hurls with horror -- so he can sketch out exactly what an invisible rooster monster looks like. It's quite detailed. The Doctor's like, "Well, hell." The Doctor heads over to the TARDIS to find some kind of technology, after distracting Amy and Vincent with a variety of cute facial expressions and his particular brand of sexy silliness turned up to about a hundred. The thing invisibly chases him inside and he finally finds the device, which is like an iPad made of bicycle parts that identifies things you put in front of it. Like he sticks out his tongue at it, and it starts throwing up pics of him from One to Two and Three. He shows the device -- "an embarrassing present from a dull Godmother with two heads and bad breath" -- Vincent's sketch, but it doesn't work. "This is the problem with the Impressionists! Not accurate enough."

Outside the TARDIS, heading back through town, the creature looms behind the Doctor, showing up on the mirror-screen, and it identifies the monster for him. Of course he doesn't know it's behind him, because huge invisible roosters are super stealthy, especially when --

spoiler -- they are blind. "You poor thing," he says, "You brutal, murderous, abandoned thing. I hope we meet again soon, so I can take you home." Short chase, of course, immediately follows.

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Amy scares the Doctor around a corner, explaining that van Gogh's snoring is driving her crazy. They buy him a courtyard full of sunflowers, to inspire him or something, and feed him breakfast. Vincent on sunflowers, and this is awesome: "It's not that I don't like them. I find them complex. Always somewhere between living and dying. Half-human, as they turn to the sun. A little disgusting. But, you know, they are a challenge." You could build a whole episode around that little speech. Maybe at some point they did. Inside, the Doctor shows him the creature -- "...The eyes, without mercy" Vincent nods -- which is called a Krafayis.

Their deal is that they travel in packs, through space, scavenging. When one gets left behind, they don't come back, because they are a brutal race. There is a stigma. So all around the universe there are these merciless, utterly abandoned Krafayis singletons, who kill and kill until they are killed, which doesn't happen because they are invisible. Which is all quite interesting because that's so one-sided -- like the one-dimensional Silurian assholes -- that you wonder how on earth they're going to make any kind of point at all when they finally meet with it. Well, I'll tell you: They won't. There are so many awesome things about this episode, but one of them is not this. So just forget everything I just told you about the Krafayis, because none of it matters any more than the rules from "Blink" could have helped at the *Byzantium*.

The Doctor and Amy drag Vincent to the church, applying a little Bill & Ted logic to the situation, all about how since he painted the creature in the window of the church, let's go to the church. The Doctor is one Nervous Nellie today, and for once he'll tell you why: "The result of our trip could be the brutal murder of the greatest artist who ever lived. Half the pictures on the wall of the Musée d'Orsay will disappear. And it will be our fault."

But first, let's check in with Vincent's manic depression. Well, he's buried face-down in the bedclothes, so probably he's in a bad way. And yes, he is. And a very good actor is playing him, which means it's absolutely terrible. The Doctor offers to help, and he assures the Doctor that he cannot. "And when you leave -- and everyone always leaves -- I will be left once more with an empty heart, and no hope." The Doctor tells him there's always hope. "Your experience is incomplete," Vincent says darkly, before he begins to scream. "I know how it will end. And it will not end well."

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The Doctor, this Eleven, he's capable of asking himself about things that the Doctor isn't usually capable of asking himself. Like, is this a good idea. He thinks not, and goes to fetch Amy. After all, Vincent asked him to leave. Everyone knows he's a delicate man. Just months from now he'll take his own life." Amy's not even trying to hear that, but the Doctor just says they're leaving van Gogh to take care of it. To get, note the wording, "to the church on time."

Of course, in the time it's taken the Doctor to get even more maudlin than his own self, Vincent has crested another wave, and he's ready to go. On the walk Amy expresses her sympathy for his sadness, but he's mature and self-aware about it in a way people on TV rarely are and people in real life invariably are: "Sometimes these moods torture me for weeks, for months. But I'm good now." Besides, if the tragic Amy Pond can soldier on, how can he not? He means it as flirtation, but since she doesn't know she's crying -- can't feel the tears pouring down her face -- she's just confused. "Oh, Amy. I hear the song of your sadness. You've lost someone, I

think." There's a hole in her that she can't name. He understands. The monster you can't look at, brighter than the sun.

The Doctor explains, about the Perseus device that will help him help Vincent with the rooster, but before he can show it off -- "I had an excellent, if smelly, godmother" -- the dead girl's casket is carried by, on the way to the church's graveyard. They stand silently, in respect. Atop the box is a bouquet of sunflowers. He can't take his eyes off them.

Outside the church, Vincent sets up and they discuss the plan, or lack of plan. "It's a Thing. It's *like* a plan, but with more greatness." He tries to explain depression to Vincent, and the stigma of mental illness, but Vincent's not interested, because he is doing art. The Doctor is chill for about five seconds and then starts babbling about Michelangelo -- "What a whinger! ...If you're scared of heights, you shouldn't have taken the job" -- and Picasso -- "Ghastly old goat. I kept telling him *Concentrate, Pablo, it's one eye, either side of the face*" -- and they keep shushing him. Needless to say, cuteness award goes to this scene, with Eleven's monumental ADD actually causing your screen to vibrate.

"Is this how time normally passes? *Really slowly*," he moans. "In the right order." Something, finally, happens, and the Doctor gets ready to head inside, armed with "overconfidence, [the iPerseus], and a small screwdriver. I'm sorted." He orders Amy to stay outside while he's working, Amy promises, she is lying, Vincent loves her because she is so sassy. Vincent keeps painting, and eventually they run into the church to save him from the rooster.

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"Right. Okay. Here's the plan. Amy? Rory?" Not Rory. Vincent. Stupid mistake. Behind a door, the Doctor wonders if the creature -- the unstoppably brutal, unthinking, terrible monster -- might not just want a little chat. "I... Know that no one's talked to you for a pretty long stretch, but please, listen. I also don't belong on this planet. I also am alone. If you trust me, I'm sure we can come to some kind of, you know, understanding." Much more running around, and then they are in the room with it. But it's not coming for them, it's feeling with its snout along the wall. It is blind.

The Doctor's embarrassed: "I'm growing old. Why does it attack, but never eat its victims? And why was it abandoned by its pack and left here to die? Why is it feeling its way helplessly around the walls of the room? That explains why it has such perfect hearing!" It attacks some more, and there's much running around, and then Vincent van Gogh -- tortured by something only he could see, hounded mercilessly by it for no reason at all, unlucky Vincent whose special and secret sight confer on him vast responsibilities and even vaster sorrows -- kills that invisible monster with an artist's easel.

Not judging. Just saying.

"He wasn't without mercy at all," Vincent says, suddenly mourning the beast. "He was without sight. I didn't mean that to happen. I only meant to wound it, I never meant to..." The beast speaks, as it dies -- *I'm afraid. I'm afraid.* -- and Vincent nods, mourning for the monster. "Like humans, who lash out when they're frightened. Like the villagers who scream at me. Like the children who throw stones at me." Everybody suddenly feels sorry for the creature, nobody questions the fact that apparently the iPerseus was incorrect, and the Doctor mourns as well: "Sometimes... Winning is no fun at all."

The three of them lay out, under the starry night, and Vincent reaches for their hands. Somehow, some magical thing tonight, he shows them what he sees: The way he sees the

beautiful world: "Look at the sky. It's not dark and black and without character. The black is in fact deep blue. And over there, lighter blue. And blowing through the blueness and the blackness, the wind swirling through the air and then, shining, burning, bursting through... The stars! Can you see how they roar their light? Everywhere we look, the complex magic of nature blazes before our eyes." They see it. They are strong, the three of them, and brave.

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Next morning they say their goodbyes. He tries to give them his famous self-portrait, but of course they do not take it. He calls Amy blessed, and beautiful, and kisses her goodbye. He asks her to marry him, to have "children by the dozen" with him, and she giggles. He throws his arms around the Doctor. "We have fought monsters together, and we have won. On my own, I fear I may not do as well." Hope isn't a blessing. He looks at Amy, and she's a little bit older now. A little bit more of a time traveler, as she begins to wonder if anything can save him.

("It's not that I don't like them. I find them complex. Always somewhere between living and dying. Half-human, as they turn to the sun. A little disgusting.")

On their way to the TARDIS, the Doctor can't stop thinking there's something else, some loving thing that he can do, to mark this place in time. They turn around, as two, as one, and head back to his villa. He takes the TARDIS pretty much in stride -- "How come I'm the crazy one, and you two have stayed sane?" -- and they do a little song and dance for him. Literally, it's brilliant: He shows Vincent one lever, which plays soothing music, and Amy dances about, hopping from foot to foot, as they take him in.

They take him to the mighty Musée d'Orsay. He loves it, every step of every staircase, past Perseus holding Medusa's head aloft: The monster you can't look at, brighter than the sun.

The Doctor comes again to Bill Nighy, just far enough away that Vincent can hear him ask about Vincent. "Big question. But to me, Van Gogh is the finest painter of them all. Certainly the most popular great painter of all time, the most beloved. His command of color the most magnificent. He transformed the pain of his tormented life into ecstatic beauty. Pain is easy to portray, but to use your passion and pain to portray the ecstasy and joy and magnificence of our world... No one had ever done it before. Perhaps no one ever will again. To my mind, that strange, wild man who roamed the fields of Provence was not only the world's greatest artist, but also one of the greatest men who ever lived."

Vincent van Gogh is crying.

Somewhere between living and dying. The Doctor takes him in his arms, apologizing, wiping at the tears. "Vincent, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Is it too much?" He holds onto the artist like they're holding each other up. Vincent throws his arms around the Doctor, squeezing him tightly, smiling brighter than anything. He stumbles to the docent, kissing him soundly, and he thanks the Doctor. He promises to change. He promises things will be better, from now on. The Doctor looked into the box and found the Hope still clinging there. It wasn't cruelty, it was love.

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Brighter than suns. "You've turned out to be the first doctor ever actually to make a difference to my life." He asks Amy to marry him, and she just grins. Not really the marrying kind, she says. She never was.

They leave him to his death. And to his life. Amy pulls her Doctor by the hand, promising they've saved him. They must have, he said they did. The invisible monster was slain. He smiled, and wept, and kissed them goodbye. Hundreds of new paintings, she says, dragging the Doctor past Perseus once again. "Oh, the long life of Vincent Van Gogh!"

There are no new paintings. The church, the man, the haystacks. A bit brighter now that they've met him. Held his hands in a field, under the brightest starry night. Watched him weep, brought him back to life. Fought beside him in a war that never ended.

"Every life is a pile of good things and bad things. Hey. The good things don't always soften the bad things. But, vice versa, the bad things don't necessarily spoil the good things, or make them unimportant. And we definitely added to his pile of good things."

Her heart is breaking, but he holds tight to her. He's talking to Amy; he's talking to Amelia. The church windows are empty, shining in the sun. Nothing evil, nothing torn behind the glass. Off, across the way, a vase of sunflowers calls to her; the warm light touches her face before she gets any closer: "For Amy, From Vincent." A pile of good things.

If they'd married, their children would be the ultimate ginger. Brighter than sunflowers. But she's not the marrying kind.



<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/the-lodger/>

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The Doctor, with Amy's help, quickly identifies Essex as differing from the fifth moon of Sinda Callista, but before they can take off again, a strange gust blows him out of the TARDIS and she takes off on her own. Aw, damn. Amy's scared, but not too scared. He lies on the ground for a bit saying her name, and one assumes he gets a lot of shit done.

Next day, a mysterious voice is calling people to the top floor of a nearby building, in a very spooky way. They go up, but they don't come down. Downstairs, chums Craig and Sophie are thinking about having a quiet night at home. They're pretty much normal-looking people, cute like on TV but not cute *for* TV. I've loved Craig for a long time now, and since this episode is basically the story of the Doctor's intensely adorable love affair with Craig, I'm good to go. Oh, also, this is the best episode of this show, maybe since I started watching it but definitely this season.

Home is good, and home is bad. It's a puzzle-box that opens from the inside and a police box that opens onto everywhere at once. The Doctor has seen his home burn; he's watched her born and burnt by the sun. Now she's a little blue box and the little blue world she orbits, and the hearts of the ones he loves. One thing a wizard can do, that nobody else in the world can do, is shatter his heart into a million pieces, stow them all over time and space, and this also is a kind of home. This is the story of just one.

There's a leak coming down from the upstairs apartment where lives, Craig shrugs, "some bloke." They're disturbed by noises from the upstairs mysteries, and talk turns to Craig's search for a new roommate: "One furnished room, available immediately, shared kitchen, bathroom, with 27-year-old male nonsmoker, £400 per calendar month, suit young professional..." Sophie likes the sound of that guy, and tells Craig to find her a man, which before you even see his face you know where this is headed. "Yeah, otherwise you'll have to settle for me!" Oh dear. But she's like, "You'll have to settle for me first," so maybe there's hope. Well, with the Doctor there's always hope. That's the problem.

Phone rings and Soph says she's got plans, Craig, nothing too important, but the girl on the other line is unrelenting: "Now she's having a Dylan crisis, on top of the Clare crisis. It could be another all-nighter. I'm sorry, but I really should go." They British out on each other that, hemming and hawing, and finally she gets him to say she can go, so she goes, and he fusses about -- van Gogh exhibit announcement, on the fridge -- and feels very unmanly. "Just tell her. Just tell her. I love you. I love you. Oh, just... 'Hey, I don't know if you knew...'"

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Craig spots Sophie's keys, which she's forgotten once again, and takes them to the door to call her name, saying to himself quietly, again and again, "I love you. I love you. I love you. I love you!" But the face at the door is not Sophie, it's the Doctor. "I love you!" he shouts, as anyone would in their right mind, and the Doctor grins brilliantly. "Good!" And then he's ready to move in. The Lodger, you see, the eponymous and titular, is the good Doctor himself. Craig's confused, because he just put up the advertisement and didn't even put his address on it.

"Well, aren't you lucky I came along? More lucky than you know! Less of a young professional -- more of an ancient amateur -- but frankly I'm an absolute dream." Ancient amateur. That's

wonderful. Craig's not entirely sure about any of this, but you know how long that's gonna last, and tries to snatch back Sophie's keys. Without really acknowledging any of this, the Doctor hands him a big jolly bag full of that pretend money they have over there.

"Don't spend it all on sweets. Unless you like sweets. I like sweets," the Doctor says, giving Craig a big old hello kiss, because that's what men do I guess, when they are alone. And nobody has to know. "I'm the Doctor. Well, they call me the Doctor, I don't know why. I call me the Doctor too. Still don't know why." Manic, insane, touching everything, being wonderful, thirty cute faces a minute, the promise that every roommate story has a shower scene in it, the bounty of it all. Who lives upstairs? Some bloke. Normal looking, very quiet. (So, clearly, like every episode this season, perception filter. Although the Bad Guy in this episode, correct me if I'm wrong, is never actually explained? We'll get there.)

Craig notices the Doctor noticing the ceiling stain and gets defensive, but the Doctor offers to fix it himself. The Doctor, he has not calmed down yet: "I'll fix it. I'm good at fixing rot. Call me the Rotmeister. No, I'm the Doctor, don't call me the Rotmeister." Well, he is good at fixing rot. And compliments. He tells Craig how lovely and impeccable is his parlor, and begs to stay. Craig offers to, you know, show him the room, and the Doctor's like, "The room? My room? Oh yes, my room! My room, take me to my room!"

I cannot think of a person on earth that I would not murder for this shit, in about half the time we've already spent, but somehow the Doctor... Oh, he is just dreamy in this one. And clearly there is something going on. I mean, the manic is just because he's nuts, but clearly there's a reason for him to be here, and a reason he already knows that we don't know, so his lack of interest in the room itself is not only a funny moment but also a clue confirming what we already were probably thinking. Don't you love watching a TV show that allows you to think, and actually watch the story unfold? (Don't you love watching a story unfold that is *actually a story*?)

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So the owner of the building itself was a man named Mark, who used to use the bedroom the Doctor will be using now but he got a large inheritance from an uncle he'd never heard of. (See? Although it's weird to think that, without even knowing good old Craig, the Doctor sent random Mark off on a whole new adventure.) The Doctor flashes psychic paper at Craig, and what it produces apparently includes a reference from the Archbishop of Canterbury, about which the Doctor gleams: "I'm his special favorite! Are you hungry? I'm hungry."

The Doctor whips up some delicious omelets for them both, continuing on as something between a blur and that dotted-line thing that happens in *Family Circus* sometimes, asking questions about all kinds of things, such as Sophie -- with just enough of a knowing wink that 's barely either; he's clearly got Craig's number this entire time -- and where they work -- a call center, which the Doctor thinks might come in handy -- and Craig starts blabbering about how their business model is totally outdated, and he knows exactly what they should do, but they'll never listen to him, etc. The Doctor assures him, once he winds down, that this happens with him all the time, because of his face. That face he's got. Craig asks where his stuff is, and he can't keep the smile out of his voice for anything: "Don't worry, it'll materialize. If all goes to plan."

Meanwhile, Amy and the TARDIS are not quite on speaking terms.

Craig, deeply satisfied, thanks the Doctor for the omelet, which he says he learned to make in 18th century Paris. "No, hang on, that's not recent, is it? 17th? No, no, no, 20th. Sorry, I'm not

used to doing them in the right order." Funny last week, funny still this week. Craig asks if the Doctor has been informed how weird he is, and he looks at Craig like it's a blind date gone terribly right: "They never really stop. Ever been to Paris, Craig?"

The Doctor's unsurprised to hear that he has not: His sofa is not the sofa of a traveler, and Craig's resemblance to his sofa is growing as well. As Craig speaks about how he'd miss Essex, he fondles Sophie's keys; finally the Doctor asks him why. It's cute.

"You're weird and you can cook, it's good enough for me." The Doctor is overjoyed to have his own "keys" that belong to a "door" that means he has his own gaff: "Yes! Me with a key." Craig mentions, sort of out of the side of his mouth, that he and Mark had an agreement about getting scarce if things required it, which of course the Doctor completely doesn't get what he means. "In case you want to bring someone round? A girlfriend, or a boyfriend?" The Doctor is like, "You bet your ass I'll shout if I end up bringing somebody home. Probably, like, *I WAS NOT EXPECTING THIS!*"

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It's like the sun coming out, it really is. Tighter writing, funnier gags... It's like a completely different show. Whoever wrote this, hold onto him. The Doctor tells Craig not to touch the rot, ever, and then takes his bluetooth elsewhere, to talk to Amy. So he's set that up at least. How much hopping about is there going to be? This could be delightfully complicated or delightfully simple.

Sophie, between the weirdness and the huge amounts of cash lying around, assumes that "the Doctor" is a drug dealer. Craig is only surprised by that because, as any good guest star on this show knows, once you trust the Doctor you don't go back. Outside, somebody else gets taken by the upstairs... Which the Doctor and Amy have figured out is the reason the TARDIS can't land: She can't quite become real, locked in a "materialization loop." Amy's like, "So go upstairs and sort it!" But it's not that obnoxious. I don't know how long all of this is taking -- the house keeps napping people and they keep yelling at each other over the earpiece as though it's one long conversation, but who knows. If Amy's really popping around up there they could be having this conversation upside down and backwards, right? Like "Blink," but as a neverending phone call.

Outside the room, Craig can only hear gibberish, thanks to the bluetooth, which is the only tech the Doctor can even use, including the sonic. So in addition to living in this random flat, he also has to be common people in other ways, like not having magic things all the time. "Arbuckle rare tarantula on the table," says the Doctor. "Practical eruption in chicken! Descartes Lombardy spiral!"

Amy laughs at him when he says all he's really gotta do is pass for an ordinary human being: "Have you *seen* you?" She starts in on the bowtie immediately, but you know that shit's not going to fly. I have the weirdest feeling that if she were being this aggressive and they were in the same room, I would find it insufferable, but something about the TARDIS going bonkers with her inside, all alone, makes her hardness sort of loveable. I mean, I guess it's the same rules as the Doctor's unrelenting oddball hysteria throughout this entire episode livable: It makes sense. And they're both so cute and it's so often hard to remember than when they're slogging through the more challenging episodes.

"Bow ties are cool. Come on, Amy, I'm a normal bloke! Tell me what normal blokes do." Telly, football, go down the pub. "I could do those things! I don't, but I could!" There are some matrixy hiccup moments and tiny time loops, but they don't really matter that much. Although

given the nature of the thing upstairs, that seems like a clue as well. He tells her to keep an eye on "the zigzag plotter," but to pull it only when standing in a certain way, it's very esoteric and sort of lovely, as far as Amy learning to be a pilot. He steals out by night, bringing home garbage.

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The Doctor's taking a shower. No big deal.

He's in there for a way long time, though, without really caring that Craig's outside, but then a mysterious bashing booming sound alerts Craig to the upstairs boarder, and he goes to check and make sure the old guy's okay. Soaking wet, the Doctor realizes that Craig is heading up there, and goes slipping and sliding around on the bathroom floor for awhile, and it's fairly excellent. Then he grabs what he thinks is his sonic, but is actually Craig's toothbrush, and runs out in a towel, hair all a mess. But no prob, because the thing upstairs doesn't want Craig, so really it's just the Doctor running around basically naked, which is totally fine at any time.

The Doctor explains, with zero shame, that he was there to save Craig from trouble. "Well? If I ever am, you can come and save me. With my toothbrush." He could, and he would. Welcome home. Sophie shows up and the Doctor waddles over in his towel and gives her a double-cheek kiss hello, and they go inside. Craig's got some kind of football problem, didn't really follow, but anyway could the Doctor substitute on Craig's team? The Doctor sees no problem with that. I hate to say it but at the very least pants are going to be required here. There's a moment where Craig and Sophie sort of awkwardly discuss her role in his life and this football league, it dies down fairly quickly and the Doctor goes to change into his uniform. That is going to be acceptable.

Soph breaks Craig's heart a bit by acknowledging the Doctor's total hotness, but before that can turn into an ugly bloodbath the Doctor sticks his out again, noting that she let herself into the building, which means she has two sets of keys to Craig's house. Neither Sophie nor Craig find this interesting, and the Doctor hides his smile for a bit later. "You must like it here too," he says sweetly. Getting dressed, the Doctor tells Amy what he's about to do, and she laughs her ass off at him, and then he tries to figure out the difference between soccer and lacrosse. (He calls it "the one with the sticks," but wasn't the last cute Doctor into cricket? So it wouldn't be cricket.)

(I don't know what any of these words mean.)

Craig's nervous about telling the team to call him "the Doctor," but of course none of them question it at all, and then there's a moment of wondering about his skill level -- "Where are you strongest?" *Arms?* -- before they try him out. He is, of course, a whiz at it, because it's all math + luck + last-ditch awesomeness + looking cute, which is pretty much also what the Doctor equals. Cue cheering for the Doctor by everybody, leaguemates, teammates. Sophie. I mean, eventually they're all just cheering *Doctor! Doctor! Doctor! Doctor!* Rough.

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Not as rough as the lady getting taken upstairs, of course, which is the cue for the Doctor's next temporal loop. He gets in the face of the -- What do you call the leader? The quarterback? The chief? Soccer Boss? -- quarterback and yells about how we are not "annihilating" anybody: "No violence, not while I'm around, not today, not ever. I'm the Doctor, the Oncoming Storm... And you meant beat them in a football match, didn't you?" Yeah. And he's down. But then a can of beer explodes in Craig's face, again and again and again, and the Doctor gets out of there so

the loop will stop. Amy and the TARDIS vanish for a second and he can't hear her, which he believes suddenly means that the TARDIS has been "flung off into the Vortex," with Amy inside. "You mean that could actually happen? You have got to get me out of here!"

Craig asks the Doctor to get lost so he can reestablish his lack of a relationship with Sophie, but the Doctor doesn't get it/isn't interested, one or the other, and Craig thinks that he's got it down -- will be leaving -- but of course he's not. Fast forward a few and they've decided to stay on the couch, turn off their phones, the rest of it. Craig starts some kind of awkward conversation that Sophie can see barreling toward her from miles away though she's powerless to stop it... Then BOOM! The Doctor pops up from behind the couch and before you know it Sophie's invited him to stay in with them.

Sometime later the conversation has morphed from Sophie inviting him to shut Craig up into actually confiding in the Doctor, just like people always do. And by a stroke of luck, she's happened on his favorite subject: The indomitable human soul and free will and not being boring: "Because life can seem pointless, Doctor. Work, weekend, work, weekend. And there's six billion people on the planet doing pretty much the same." The Doctor mumbles to himself that watching the Craig & Sophie glacial mating dance makes him wonder where all those folks even came from, and then changes the subject before they can nail him on it.

"So, the call center. That's no good? What do you really want to do?" Work with animals. Like there was this orangutan sanctuary on telly that she loved, but -- as Craig almost smugly points out -- she's unqualified for that work. Just when you think it's going to some kind of dark codependent place where Craig might be subtly keeping her down, Sophie brings up the time Craig also refused a job elsewhere, in London. "I can't see the point of London!" he says. The Doctor has sort of had enough.

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"Perhaps you'll just have to stay here, secure and a little bit miserable until the day you drop. Better than trying and failing, eh? Everybody's got dreams, Sophie, very few are going to achieve them, so why pretend? Perhaps, in the whole universe, a call center is where you should be?" Sophie is horrified, and with just a little prodding spits it out: "I'm not staying in a call center all my life, I can do anything I want!" He turns on her the most gorgeous, shining grin that ever crept across a face, and Sophie has herself a genuine moment. "Oh, yeah! Right, oh my God! Did you see what he just did?" Craig's like, "Um, you're going to live with monkeys now?"

The Doctor isn't letting them off that easy: "Big old world, Sophie. Work out what's really keeping you here, eh?" They are glum, and stare into space for a bit, before Craig asks the question again, hoping for a better answer... But she has no option but to agree, that there's nothing really keeping her in Essex, because at this point neither of them can actually call the bluff. The Doctor is like, "Good *Lord*."

Having assembled something brilliant out of bikes and refuse, the Doctor -- with Amy standing by on the bluetooth -- scans the upstairs. But there's nothing really going on up there. "Only for you could too normal be a problem," Amy scoffs. "You said I could be lost forever? Just go upstairs!" The Doctor's feeling cautious, for once, and then realizes Amy can get him the plans, which will reveal that -- much like the house in Ledworth -- there are floors and doors that shouldn't be. Little does the Doctor know that right outside, Craig has decided to touch the rot on the ceiling, muttering "Rotmeister" darkly under his breath.

Next morning, the Doctor -- knowing how rough last night was on him -- brings Craig breakfast. Craig is not doing so well, having touched the rot, and is near comatose. The Doctor gets

incredibly frightened for him, desperate and wild-eyed, and starts yelling: "What's that? An unfamiliar and obviously poisonous substance? Oh, I know what would be really clever, I'll *stick my hand in it!*"

Home. A little bit of home, dying in front of him. Amy in danger so terrible he can barely admit it. All alone in the world at the bedside of a dying man.

The Doctor works and works, like a doctor, until he can get Craig to breathe; runs out in the kitchen to find stuff to "reverse the enzyme decay" and "excite the tannin molecules," and after a bit longer he's got Craig living again. Of course Craig immediately is off to work, but the Doctor makes him stay down. "It's the planning meeting!" The one that will save him, and the company, and make him something special. His orangutan habitat: "It's important!" he tries to shout, falling back against the bedclothes. "*You're* important," the Doctor hums, more lovingly than almost anything I can think of him saying this year. "You're going to be fine, Craig."

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Hours later, Craig wakes up refreshed... And having missed the meeting by a mile. He goes running into work, screaming at himself and apologizing profusely to his boss, until he notices the Doctor at his desk, on his phones, talking shit to his ruder clients. "Craig, how are you feeling? Had some time to kill, I was curious, never worked in an office. Never worked in anywhere." Craig tries to throttle him, but bossman tells him to be nice. "Leave off the Doctor, I love the Doctor! He was brilliant in the planning meeting."

Craig is nonplussed, but the Doctor claims he was there as Craig's representative, and that in fact the rude clients just aren't that important anymore, now that Craig is winning at life. Sophie brings the Doctor custard creams, and says she's applied as a volunteer already, for a wildlife charity. Everybody is sort of shiny and bright and delighted with themselves, as you can imagine: What if the Doctor came to your work for like one day? That would be the most awesome day! He orders Craig back to bed, and gets weird on the phone some more: "Hello, Mr. Joergensen! Can you hold? I have to eat a biscuit!"

When Craig, upper lip stiff as all get out, returns to kick the Doctor out -- for making his dreams come true, for giving Sophie life, for changing everything -- the Doctor is busy in a meeting of his own. With a housecat.

"Have you been upstairs? Yes? You can do it. Show me what's up there? What's behind that door? Try to show me. Oh, that doesn't make sense! Ever see anyone go up there? Lots of people? Good good. What kind of people? People who never come back down. That's very bad."

Even if he looked like the Doctor, even if he made omelets and changed the lives of all my friends, I'm afraid having weirdo conversations with animals would be something of a dealbreaker. We would need to have a talk. But Craig, he is dunzo. "I can't take this anymore. I want you to go. You can have this back, and all," he says, handing over the rent bag. And why? Because everybody loves him, and the soccer game, and he seems to excel at Craig's job, and now Sophie's all about the monkeys, and what about this bicycle sculpture in the bedroom? (Be honest, that's annoying. It goes on the list.) "It's art! A statement on modern society, ooh, ain't modern society awful?" See? On the list.

The conversation goes on for quite a while, Craig nearly weeping with anger and a sort of pent-up powerlessness, and the Doctor responding by getting weirder and more elliptical with every comment, begging-without-begging Craig to let him stay. Finally, without options and balanced on top of a crazy amount of stuff to deal with, the Doctor just rears back and



headbutts himself into Craig's brain. It's pretty amazing. Craig staggers back, full of sudden knowledge: Timelords and TARDISEs and regenerations. Something that always came across as deeply intimate, like with Reinette, pub hooligan style: Brilliant. Just amazing. Welcome home.

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Another headbutt, and Craig learns about the upstairs, and Amy in the sky and time, and the window adverts -- where, sometime but not yet, Amy will star the correct one and add a better address -- and then Craig gets a bit ahead of us: "That's a *scanner*! You used non-technological technology of Lammasteen!" The Doctor is like, "Chill, chill, chill."

But he shouldn't worry, because the upstairs -- this time a little girl -- is busy eating somebody else. Somebody named Sophie.

The Doctor radios to Amy -- whom Craig instantly remembers, and understands their language, entire new worlds in his head; really nothing so different than what the Doctor did to Amy last night -- and lets her in on what the cat said. "I know he's got a time engine in the flat upstairs. He's using innocent people to try and launch it. Whenever he does, they get burnt up, hence the stain..."

And then it all goes a bit mental. Craig gets stuck in another little loop, as the upstairs claims Sophie -- "People are dying up there! People are dying people are dying..." They snap out and run upstairs, figuring out that it's Sophie. Of course, Amy finally gets ahold of the plans, informing that there's no upstairs. There's never been an upstairs.

"The time engine isn't in the flat, the time engine *is* the flat! Someone's attempt to build a TARDIS..." Craig's not sure, and the Doctor explains about perception filters, most notably how they affect memory. What's there now? A sort of TARDIS-y kind of thing, with buttresses and spots you can put your hand on if you want to get all burnt up. Deadlocked inside with it, the Doctor and Craig are helpless to do anything but chat the Bad Guy up, with no small amount of charm.

"The ship has crashed. The crew are dead. A pilot is required." It's a hologram, a simple crash program, that's been bringing people up to see if they can run the engine -- never figuring out that humans can't do it, no matter how many people it burns out on attempt. The program figures out that the Doctor can help, after seventeen murders, and gets very excited. Essentially Wall\*E is a serial killer and the Doctor is like the ultimate possible pilot. It begins to reel him in. "I'm way too much for this ship," he hisses at Craig. "My hand touches that panel, the planet doesn't blow up, the whole solar system does."

He swears to the program that it's wrong about this too, and then realizes that Craig is the only holdout. It didn't want Sophie, although now it does: What's the difference? Sophie isn't afraid of leaving anymore. And the Doctor, he's pretty much made out of leaving. Then there's Craig, who is turning into a sofa. The machine wants people who want to escape. The Doctor tells Craig that -- ...Gets a bit ropery here, but I don't mind. It's pretty much required by this story -- all he needs to do is touch the engine and, instead of thinking about the desire to leave, think about all the things he wants to stay for. All the ways he'd prefer stasis over change. Home over adventure. Sophie. "And I don't want to leave Sophie! I can't leave Sophie! I love Sophie!" Well, you know me. Sophie admits she's in love with him too, and it's all very sweet, and then actually in order to break the spell this damned show goes so far as to have everybody yelling, "Kiss the girl!"

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So he does. I don't have it in me to be exhausted by this, not in such a well-formed episode. If that's the worst thing this episode shares with the others, that is fine. Kiss the girl, I don't care. God knows if boys didn't kiss girls all the time the world really would end. Just ask any boy.

So. Top floor's gone, and cuteness reigns: "So have we spoiled our friendship, then?" *Totally ruined it.* "And what about the monkeys?" Ah, who cares. They spin out every scene of the episode, between them: "I could see the point of Paris if you were there with me," more kissing, the Doctor being all appalled and the like. The usual stuff.

Before the Crack reappears behind Craig's refrigerator, before Amy and the Doctor go back through the story leaving themselves clues and rewriting wills for Mark, before Amy finds her engagement ring hidden in the Doctor's pocket, before the Cracks begin to open, before Silence and Song, before the Pandorica opens:

Craig grabs the Doctor before he can sneak away, and orders him to hold onto those keys. To have a home. Craig knows, has walked the ramparts and the hallways, Craig knows the Doctor won't come back.

It doesn't make a difference. That's not what home is for.

<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/the-pandorica-opens-a/>

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Well, Vincent van Gogh is not doing so great. He's rolling around in bed screaming his ass off, like you do, but at least he's got a doctor and a judgy old bird-breasted landlady around this time. They're mostly worried about A) his crazy and B) the neighbors, but then she spots one of his paintings -- "even worse than his usual rubbish" -- and wonders what it could be. Vincent is not available for comment, because he's too busy screaming and screaming.

I guess this is because he is a time-traveler? Because they did so well not falling into the oracle/madness trap with him before. In any case, I like that he's flipping out not because of the usual Mean Reds but in fact because he loves the Doctor and Amy and the TARDIS, as we will see. And anyway, it's nice to see him. When I heard about the guest-stars, good guys and otherwise, I got very worried about how this was going to go down -- Daleks v. Cybermen is still a raw little bruise for a lot of us -- but in fact this whole string of time bits is rushed through pretty nicely.

A bunch of years later, in Churchill's bunker, there are phone calls: It's that robot man who remembered how to Love and became a Real Boy instead of a Robot, and who now has a black glove meant I guess to imply that his left hand is very sophisticated robot technology. Churchill chomps on a cigar and twiddles his bowtie and *harrumphs* and once again makes himself a Churchill cartoon, additionally asking dumb questions without answers which the robot man can then answer:

They randomly just turned up -- since of course it didn't exist until that last scene, which is a cool thing about time travel stories that gets quite a workout here -- a genuine van Gogh ("behind the wall in an attic in France," which for some reason is hilarious to me, like of course, that's where you find most things) and then these same "they" brought it to Churchill because "obviously" it's a message. From who to whom? From van Gogh, to the Doctor, via Churchill. "You're not supposed to understand it, Prime Minister," says the robot man. "You're supposed to deliver it."

Churchill calls the TARDIS to tell him about the painting, but she reroutes the call to Dr. (Not Professor, note) Song. She's in a Stormcage cell in 5145, which puts her ahead of the last time we saw her -- which we know, because the Pandorica is about to open -- and when the poor young guard answers the phone she stops writing in her TARDIS notebook long enough to get really scared for him. For her husband, who danced at their wedding.

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"Give me that. Seriously, just give it to me. I'm entitled to phone calls." She and Churchill iron out the details of how the TARDIS rerouted the call, and how it won't be long until the connection breaks, so then Churchill quickly tells her about this mysterious painting working its way through the entire season of the show. Immediately, she snogs the guy and puts him into crazytown, so when the other guys arrive he's pointing a gun at nothing and yelling how she'll never trick him with her hallucinogenic lipstick. It's fairly hilarious -- she's best when she's cheeky and funny, less so when being emptily *fatale* -- as is the punchline: A stick-figure of her, big mass of curly hair, one stick arm waving, a speech bubble: "Bye!"

Oh, River Song, you are lovely sometimes. So she gets herself to the Royal Collection, still in 5145, on the Starship *UK*, which is another brilliant idea it's nice to see pulled from the tapestry: This idea of an entire culture dragging its artifacts behind itself. (Even if it's still annoying to be reminded of how little sense Liz 10's society makes.) She shows up and of course gives another badass little speech about how awesome she is, but that's fine since it's Moffat and only *one* of the women needs to be an empty caricature at any given. For the first time, our sympathies lie with River, so we're standing at her side as she begs the bloody Queen to let her steal the mysterious painting and take it to the Doctor, and that's all there is to Liz 10, who is looking lovely as usual. And terribly, terribly sad, at whatever she is seeing there.

Now over to a scummy factory-issue arms dealing location called the Maldovarium (which word is funny if you're a *Farscape* person because the guy she's talking to looks eerily like the fat gay version of Zhaan that one time). He's named Dorium, and he's going to sell her a vortex manipulator, which is one of those wrist-cuff time machine things that always comes up when Jack Harkness is around. In this case, it's still on the severed wrist of whatever "handsome Time Agent" it once belonged to. River Song, as we will pretty much continually see for the next two hours, does not fuck around.

Still not sure how she's any different than Jack Harkness in drag, other than being infinitely less annoying and dimpled. In return, River offers Dorium a "Callisto Pulse" -- which takes the form of an earring, because all of her stuff is jewelry and makeup and magic shoes and teleportation tampons and if she ever had a TARDIS it would be Barbie Pink -- which he'll find useful for disarming the microexplosives she just dosed him with, that are now teeming through his gravid form. I think part of the actual -- not the endlessly explicit and told-not-shown, but the actual, the perceivable -- charm of River is her lovely smile when she's doing something *really awful*.

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Amy's all concerned with her, or as far as she knows the Doctor's, engagement ring. It's quite a rock. She can't take her eyes off it, and sitting underneath the TARDIS's main console in a funny little porch-swing situation, she nearly tries it on. Of course the Doctor appears, hanging upside down and being adorable, and yelling in his particularly unhelpful elliptical way about... Something. Something great: Planet One, a field trip to the oldest planet in the universe.

"There's a cliff of pure diamond and according to legend, on the cliff there's writing. Letters fifty feet high, a message from the dawn of time, and no one knows what it says because no one's ever translated it. 'Til today!"

(Um, I can do that for you right now, babe: It is going to say *HELLO SWEETIE*. That is the *only possible thing* it can say. Well, *BAD WOLF* would be funny. *WE APOLOGIZE FOR THE INCONVENIENCE. I WASN'T EXPECTING THIS.*)

Onward, to "the very first words in recorded history" (a phrase just *deathly* annoying in its multivalent stupidity, if you think about it), and there they are -- among giant *Alice*-ish toadstools and on a cliffside not remotely reminiscent of diamond -- *HELLO SWEETIE*, with the Doctor's old Gallifrey nickname -- just in case it wasn't clear who was being addressed -- and a few random glyphs meant to be coordinates for the next scene.

Except okay, there was no reason for the Doctor to take Amy to Planet One today. I mean, wank it any way that feels good to you, that's my motto, but he honestly just said, for no reason, "I don't know why I didn't think of this before," and then took her to the place so the next stuff could happen. Any other storyline that didn't entirely involve universe-wide changes to the

continuum and temporal backdrafts like Vincent painting whatever he painted, I don't suppose it would bother me. This is one of those rare stories where "today" actually counts as "today," because the Cracks are closing in and, as we'll see, the universe is literally getting smaller. Whatever, he's a wizard, and it makes them both tremendously happy, and Amy deserves something at least for taking the trouble to show up this week.

So the coordinates take them to Earth: "Britain. 1:02 AM. No, PM. No, AD..." They stare at a Roman Legion and have a slightly awkward conversation about the various Romans invasions of Britain, which convo is so awkward, in fact, that you're distracted from the main point: *Invasion Of The Hot Italians* was Amy's favorite thing in school. (Is there something British I'm not getting here, which she uses "topic" the way we might once have used "theme" and would now probably just call an "essay"?)

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The Hot Italians approach and hail the Doctor as Caesar, and the Doctor is just loving this, ironically, and the guy's all "we're honored by your presence" and he grins: "Well, you're only human. Arise... Roman person?" Why does he think the Doctor is Caesar? It could have to do with the lipstick smeared all over his face. They take our heroes to "Cleopatra," which is just so complicated and hilarious, because the only real upshot is seeing River Song in a nutty Cleopatra outfit, like they just released a new round of adorable paper-doll outfits to dress her up in.

Amy is, as usual, happy to see River. The Doctor is, as usual, wary and charmed in equal measure by her. I like the way Eleven acts with her, because he's so intrigued by the unknown quantity that she represents. I imagine when you know everything about everything that comes at a bit of a premium. Scary and exciting at once. And I like that no matter how creepy her mysteries get, she's also always so affectionate and kind about things.

(I mean, I'm wary of it, being that kind of thing which so very easily goes to the *noir* place -- Lena Olin in *Romeo Is Bleeding* as a sort of feral personification of the world and all its hassles and frights and delights -- which in Moffat's hands skips over any sort of mystery and becomes basically a very clean and plasticized fetishization: As Amy is a USB drive and the Library was a little girl and the *Mme de Pompadour* was a spaceship, so River is the cruel universe, touching the Doctor in unseemly ways from various relative angles in time and space. Which, put women on a pedestal or don't, but when your options are personality-free automaton or Universal Mommy-Womb? We never had a chance.)

The Doctor's like, "Girl! You totally wrecked the oldest cliffs of time!" And she's like, "You wouldn't answer your phone!" And I had to kiss dudes, and take calls from Churchill, and all kinds of bullshit. She hands over the painting, finally, and says the dreaded thing about Vincent I was hoping they'd leave out -- "He had visions, didn't he?" -- because it sort of craps on the *very* carefully non-sentimental thing that was the best part of the Vincent story -- but in any case, there it is: One of his last works, we finally see, was of: The TARDIS exploding.

Credits and then a complicated sort of frame where the three of them -- River dressed normally of a sudden -- are riding horses very quickly toward somewhere, while we go back to a second ago to pick up the conversations they had immediately preparatory to the ride. I think this serves two purposes, in that it serves any purpose, by first making this all seem very exciting in spite of the exposition, and giving the impression that they've been riding for a long time when they get there, and also in making us more curious about where we're going than why we're going there. All of which are good ideas, maybe even necessary, but I'm still not sure about this as an editing choice because the exciting horseback ride is not that exciting, unless grim faces



with a strong sense of purpose are something you're into -- and even still, we don't know what the grim faces are actually about until the end of the parallel scenes, so it's just sort of fraught with this meaningless meaning.

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Amy once again shows off her similarities to Winston Churchill by asking questions without answers in order to get us to the next scene -- Why's the TARDIS exploding? *Probably this is a warning*. About what? *Probably about the TARDIS exploding, you retard* -- River finally shakes free of this nonsense and points out that Vincent put the Sweetie coordinates on the door of the TARDIS in the painting, and also he named it *The Pandorica Opens*. What's a Pandorica? "A box. A cage. A prison. It was built to contain the most feared thing in all the universe." Obviously the Doctor. Come on.

But the Doctor doesn't believe in stuff like the Pandorica, because it's a fairytale (having forgotten, I guess, the eleven times it's been explained to him, and us, on a weekly basis, that fairytales can be real if you just believe in the stars and heterosexual marriage). Of course, it's important for him to maintain this belief as long as possible so that we can see that the Pandorica sort of *is* a fairytale, just not the kind he's talking about, because in the abjectly and patently stolen references game we've worked our way through the 1800 and early 1900's and now we're getting into *Labyrinth* territory, suddenly and without warning. River's not interested in debating the finer points of all this, because the facts on the ground are that every single person from every episode this season has been working overtime to get the Doctor to the imaginary Pandorica, which is going to be involved with the TARDIS exploding, and only Vincent could do this because it's been buried "for centuries," aka five minutes ago thanks to time travel, so let's ride some horses to Stonehenge.

(I must admit I thought the Brits -- and more overzealous anglophiles -- in the audience would have a shit-fit about that, the Stonehenge thing, because it's so on the nose. Like if every British story written about America took place *actually within* the Statue of Liberty. But what it's taken me nearly an entire season to figure out is that -- maybe before this, but definitely by the "Hungry Earth" story -- the entire discourse has become so degraded and hysterical -- on both sides, myself included -- that we're talking about the group *least* likely to acknowledge qualitative claims. Because what I figured out is that you have two wildly dissimilar groups of people involved in consuming this show, and conversations between them are nearly unhaveable, to wit:

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One group, the aforementioned anglophiles and lifelong fans of the show, are fans of *Doctor Who* as an enduring, continuity-rich phenomenon that ties their love of science fiction and British accents and lovely childhood memories of Saturday afternoon PBS marathons. To them, and it took me awhile to locate my sympathy for this viewpoint, *Doctor Who* is one long story with various ups and downs but which serially and experientially is worth more than the sum of its parts. That is lovely. It's also a Perfect Storm of nerdlily arrogance and assumptions about the point of all this which are only matched by:

Group B, who could give a shit about the history of the show, were never fans of the show, and probably wandered in on a similarly anglophile or SyFy route after exhausting their Hulu queues of episodes of *Green Wing* and whose copies of *Pride & Prejudice* will never sit duty on their shelves as Colin Firth gets older and fatter and wrinklier day by day. If I fall into a category it's this one, but because of my job -- and lifelong willingness to drop, say, a comic book when it gets dumb -- I have an even bigger issue here, which is my belief that when you

change *everything about a show*, from producers and writers and actors to overarching thematic and semiotic structures, you have messed with its DNA to the point that it must be considered and evaluated *as a different show*.

And actually the comic-book reference here is totally apt -- and maybe helpful to the conversation, since it's a bit more removed -- because you have the same thing: People who like Claremont or Morrison's run on *X-Men*, who can drop it and pick it up a hundred times, and then the people who will always love the *X-Men*, in whatever form they take. And the conversations, the real ugly ones, the ones that get into death-threats and all manner of social ineptitude, are I think because of our preference for staying wherever we live.

Because in terms of the apologists, you can get to a really ugly place really fast where *any* criticism of the thing on a weekly basis becomes a criticism of the thing itself as one huge monolithic beast, and interrupts the "fun" nitpicking that continuity hounds love, and generally just means getting repetitive and apologist and *ad hominem* in terms of protecting the sacrosanct thing that is larger than its parts: If you only liked the show since the reboot, for example, probably this means you are a stupid shipper and a girl -- who shouldn't even be here anyway, like those *Twilight* bitches that ruined the concept of fan conventions for all time -- but in any case, you have no reverence for the history here and thus no valid references for your concerns, so please shut up while we get back to our intense debate about whether the Red Humanoid from that one Peter Davison story could be related genetically to some other stupid thing. I always felt like RTD gave a healthy bunch of slack to those people, but I had no idea what actual fan service could look like until this year, of which I objectively approve because it makes people happy, and basically is a continuity playground with lots of fun ideas and nothing, really, that interests me personally.

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And similarly, if you're working from the other angle, those people seem insane, because you get to be arrogant about how you would *never* have watched that bullshit with the rubber suits, and that this season seems to have been *bornas* bullshit with rubber suits, and all the other benefits that come from living the neurotypical lifestyle. Missing the point -- and I say this as one of them -- entirely. How crude it must seem for those of us in Group B to barge into a sandbox that has been sitting there for sixty years, True Fans playing quietly among themselves, and we start throwing around Gay Agendas and Companion Worship and making the Doctor action figures kiss each other and demanding bathos and pathos and emotions and religion, when all Group A wanted were imaginative playtimes with complex intellectual toys and a little science and a little history and a lot of running around and a consistent episode-grading scheme that could be endlessly discussed.

Either way, it says a lot about us, and most of all about where our particular personal pride and self-image comes from, w/r/t to this particular thing at this particular time. "I am a Real Fan," says the apologist, and "This show is going down the tubes" says the newborn fan who feels burnt by the show returning to its sexist, heartless, meaningless roots. Neither of them are right, neither of them particularly behaving in a flattering way, but definitely -- I think you can see -- embroiled in an unhaveable conversation, in which stances are taken and defended to the death that have little merit and even less consequence. And if I had figured this out sometime over the past five years, maybe I could have gotten onboard with that, because gentle teasing about a silly fun thing is not something I'm terrible at, but the hateful futility of waiting for Godot with this particular iteration of the show has, at points, turned me completely terrible.)

Stonehenge! The Doctor and Song run around analyzing the rocks looking for ghosts and explaining shit to Amy, like how Song's not been to the *Byzantium* yet in her personal history,

and eventually coming around to reexplaining the Pandorica once more, given their analysis: "If the Pandorica is here, it contains the mightiest warrior in history. Now, half the galaxy would want a piece of that. Maybe even fight over it." He puts a shapely ear to one big rock, and realizes they need to go down.

Science, and then a rock moves aside, leading them down old, old steps into Underhenge, which is under Stonehenge, which hence the name. Spooky ongoing times, and a Cybusman head nobody noticed, back up above, sparking and wiggling and being scary, and then they reach the central chamber, wherein is found among much musical grandeur the Pandorica. It's lovely, sort of Lament-Configuration, and from off its door and stepping over more Cyberparts, the Doctor reads his story:

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"There was a goblin. Or a trickster, or a warrior. A nameless, terrible thing, soaked in the blood of a billion galaxies. The most feared being in all the cosmos. And nothing could stop it, or hold it, or reason with it. One day it would just drop out of the sky and tear down your world."

Now this, I can get into. If there were a story here, what a wondrous one: The most appealing regeneration to take the title, held accountable for all the petty slights and destructions of his 900 years. Especially in this season, where at least once an episode he lets somebody down in a major damned way, which has been one of the most intriguing themes all year. There's a neat little exchange here too, where the Doctor explains that the goblin was tricked into the bottle by a "good wizard," which River jokes about, how it's invariably the Doctor those stories are about.

(Which is where I guess my chief problem has always come from, with Moffat, and this is where it really started to sink in: There's solid, committed, engaged mythopoesis -- Gaiman and Moore, the Inklings, even Moorcock -- and then there's the incomplete, lazy version you get from Gaiman's comic-book heirs or the darling and always-improving China Miéville, in which the emotional and spiritual qualities of that particular literary move are substituted for postmodern mashup, in a tone-deaf and overintellectualized way that suggests the author -- and his readers, or viewers -- don't actually know the difference. And I think what's been damning for me, in large part, is less the idea that Moffat doesn't write on more than a few layers, because that's fine: It's the fact that several of the layers he chooses have so many of the *trappings* of actual mythic fiction -- specifically but not limited to those left him by Davies -- that it starts to feel, to me, like I've been set up.

You can't write a fairytale about fairytales, or a myth about myths, without putting yourself firmly in another genre that's not half as interesting, to me, because it treats the most powerful and the most trivial stories as equivalent products, with no intrinsic meaning. Dora the Explorer rubbing shoulders with Aphrodite and the Fanta Girls makes everything less awesome, not moreso, if you've got any connection to the mythic at all. And if not, it's all in fun anyway, so there's been no harm and no foul.

In other words -- and I really want to be clear about this, so I'm going on and on, but it's happening now because I do like this episode a lot more than the next one, and because I feel like I have just enough distance today to explain the situation without pissing you off -- Davies's Cybermen were terrifying because of the threat of facelessness and spiritual oblivion that they represent: Assimilation, the Procrustean shaving-off of undesirable parts, becoming a slave to faceless industry like all the rest of them, harvested and caught in a horrific un-life that *hurts all the time and never ends*. Before/after Davies, though, the Cybermen are terrifying because and only because they are *jolly big robots that want to eat your face*.

Which is valid, and has never entered into my critiques of the show, because I do think it's valid: Moffat writes things that are scary, or wondrous, or mysterious, because they feel scary, wondrous, mysterious to him, without investigating why those things are true. Which is fine, because it works in the same way that all good children's literature started as bedtime stories, and at the end of the day, it completely works out. But you get that sympathetic effect only if you're in this for the same reasons as Moffat, meaning that you're a fan of the show qua the show. He's a brilliant Group A Fan, and his love of this show is entrancing and written on every breath. But if you expect anything from your entertainment other than that, you're screwed, because there isn't anything more to it: Women are confounding creatures without an owner's manual or an off switch, robot heads eating your face are scary because that's scary, constantly talking about how bad-ass you are is bad-ass, and Rory's a hero because we say so.)

Amy notices the similarities between "Pandorica" and "Pandora's Box," finally, because they are so very obtuse, and explains to us about what that is, and also that it was her favorite book when she was a kid. This is stressing the Doctor out to the point where he's making up aphorisms, because now it's all sort of piling up that Amy is the universal USB we always knew she was, but he keeps going: The box will be easy to open, because it's a prison. Those are harder to open from the inside than the outside, for obvious reasons. In fact, it's already opening itself -- the puzzlebox that opens from the inside, they called it once -- and so now it's just a matter of hours. Deadlocks, time-stops, matter-lines, other things I don't know about. I can't believe we're fifteen minutes in and nobody has mentioned "perception filters."

Other questions: What could need all that? What could get past all that? What could inspire that level of fear? Has the Doctor met this Goblin? Why is it opening now? How could Vincent have known about it? Why are Stonehenge and Underhenge suddenly transmitting a warning to everyone, everywhere, to every time zone that the Pandorica is opening? (Oh good: Including "poor Vincent," who wasn't a Crazy Oracle after all. That's a relief.) And if all this is happening, why doesn't the Doctor know about this? It seems pretty major. And should they stop the signal before everybody starts showing up? (Wow, I just realized the Significant Date is no longer Significant, since there was never a wedding, since there was never a Rory. That's sad.) And what's going on in the sky?

The moment where the Doctor and River silently and simultaneously realize company's coming, it is pretty beautiful. Around the planet, suddenly, there are "at least" ten thousand starships, River reports: Maybe bajillions, because her tech can only count so high. (Again, credit where it's due: This is the only time I can think of where the entirety of bad guys and aliens we've ever seen on the show could be in one place without feeling like Uncle Rusty had gotten ahead of himself again. I love, love this story.) There are: Daleks, Cyberships, Sontarans (yay!), Terileptil, Slitheen, Chelonian, Nestene, Drahvin, Sycorax, Haemogoth, Zygon, Atraxi, Draconian.

(Of interest particularly: The Nestene Consciousness, which I remembered as a pile of barf that you swing over like Indiana Jones, having completely forgot the majority of that episode, in which there were Robot Mickeys and Robot Cars and Robot Dumpsters going chomp-chomp-chomp and eventually a silly mannequin hand which was like the one thing

Eccleston ever did that wasn't entirely about making you cry until you passed out with your thumb in your mouth.)

After a moment of just naked, little-boy fear, the Doctor runs around with twice the crazy from a second ago, and his body language gets very flouncy and scared and very, very much in need of a hug. (Maybe a shower, maybe that would help.) The thing I guess starts opening? Some reason, the Doctor beats ass up to the surface, and the ladies follow, and up in the sky it's very beautiful and starshipy and rainbow lens-flares galore. River begs him to run, just like this one time, because check it out: "Everything that ever hated you is coming here tonight. You can't win this."

Of all the things you just don't say to the Doctor, I would put that at the top of the list.

The Doctor pulls out his binocs and stares up and decides that he's going to employ "the greatest military machine in the history of the universe." *The Daleks?* Amy asks. *The Sontarans?* I obsessively ask, as always, with the Clerics from the *Byzantium* of course as my second wish. But no, obviously he's talking about the Romans.

Who -- when our heroes arrive on horseback -- are just full of piss and vinegar. The Doctor and River are taken into custody (Amy stayed back at Stonehenge, where every single one of the Doctor's enemies over 900 years are hanging out) and the commander yells for awhile about how it's funny that "Cleopatra" has been chilling with them all week, even though she's both in Egypt and dead at this point in history. There are various sci-fi noises and camera-shaking tectonic scares because of all the spaceship baddies, which has got the commander's skirts all in a tangle as well.

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"When you fight barbarians, what must they think of you?" River asks, which is sort of a rude way of explaining herself. "Where do they think you come from?" The commander, in a way that has sort of begged the question, draws his sword: "A place more deadly and more powerful and more impatient than their tiny minds can imagine." Quite a damn coincidence that he would phrase it exactly that way, but it's such a thrilling moment that I don't really mind. River squarenesses a nearby tea hutch into nothingness to prove that she is just that same thing to him: "Your world has visitors. You're all barbarians now." She explains that her gun could be called "the work of the Gods," if you're stupid, but that she knows as a soldier he can't really believe in the Gods anymore -- which is also a stupid thing to say, but whatever, he's in it now. "There is, however, a man. And tonight he's going to need your help." And suddenly, there is a very narrow fellow with a pointy nose and a distinct lack of comedic ability standing there, ready to volunteer despite not actually existing in the timespace continuum.

So what's this got to do with the TARDIS? The TARDIS was exploding, is that going to happen? Good questions, but the Doctor has no time for that. He's too busy extending the forcefield technology inside the Pandorica in order to cover the whole of Stonehenge, which will get them another hour. As he says, "There are fruitflies on Hoppledom-6 that live for twenty minutes, and they don't even mate for life." Oh yeah? Speaking of mating for life -- and how it confers the gift of subjective reality on little girls, even strippers -- what about this engagement ring I got out of your pocket last week?

The Doctor gets very wriggly at that point, due to Rory-related sadness, and will only describe the ring as a reminder of somebody he lost. She won't give it back to him; she feels a feeling when she touches it (maybe she really could *have it all!*) and he tries to get her to Red Rover herself back to us: "People fall out of the world sometimes, but they always leave traces. Little

things we can't quite account for. Faces in photographs, luggage, half eaten meals... Rings... Nothing is ever forgotten, not completely. And if something can be remembered, it can come back." Very pretty speech, wonderfully delivered, and a perfect center to the set-piece that our one million concepts are whirling around this week.

Amy asks if the gone girl was nice, and he rolls his eyes because wow it's complicated, and since they're about to get a half-hour, he decides to peel some onion off this story. "Remember that night you flew away with me? And you asked me why I was taking you, and I told you there wasn't a reason? I was lying." The reason was her house. Too big, too many empty rooms. "Does it ever bother you, Amy? That your life doesn't make any sense?"

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YES.

...But no, because it's time for a big old fight with a disassembled Cyberman, in which they take turns running back and forth between big pillars in order to draw its fire so they can get around and stop the Cyberman shooting their brains out or eating their meat, and he explains Cybermen and how this one is missing his meat altogether and will be looking to assimilate them. "It's just like being an organ donor, except you're alive. And sort of screaming?" Eventually, with much fun banter and thrilling excitement, the Doctor subdues the Cyberman, but then it's like LOL j/k and attacks some more.

Also, there's not just the shooting arm and the head upstairs, but the head snaking around on Amy's whole body while the arm electrocutes the Doctor and he gets unconscious, and then the Cyberface opens and a skull falls out and it's awful and then it claps at her, the face, and that's awful, and then she slams it against the wall, and then it randomly shoots a sleepy dart at her, and then just when she's being sleepily feisty about it, a big nasty body wandering in like Nearly Headless Nick, and puts the mean head on its body, and it's all wonderfully dramatic/traumatic, and then she's in like a closet and the Cyberman for some reason is stymied by this, and she listens at the door and it's scary, and then before you know it the Cyberman on the other side of the door has been fully sworded through the chest, which is usually the best way to kill a robot.

And who did the swording? Why, Rory. Whom she doesn't recognize, and can't even really say hello to, because she's passing out from the dart administered by the head before it gained a body. One of Rory's Romans and the Doctor appear, check her out, and then the Doctor and Rory have a long, long conversation about what they need to do next to fight the many bad guys, and Rory keeps trying to call the Doctor's attention to his paradoxical existence, and it's funny but would be a lot funnier if Rory were capable of being funny, but the Doctor's funny enough for the both of them, and it drags out so long that when the Doctor finally recognizes him it's like the greatest moment ever involving Rory.

"Rory, I'm not trying to be rude, but you died. You died and then you were erased from time. You didn't just die, you were never born at all, you never existed." Rory's like, he remembers dying and he remembers being a Roman, but there's a certain fuzziness pertaining to the middle act of that one, which is distracting now that he's thinking about it. And when he leans over Amy and asks the Doctor if she missed him, the Doctor doesn't quite know what to say, because this is a story that is functionally sad on every possible level. Fundamentally heartbreaking, I will not deny it.

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Luckily, the Pandorica is finally opening -- and it is gorgeous, all wheels-within-wheels and glowing Tronnishly -- and River's on a horse getting more and more annoyed with the Doctor's lack of plan. She rides off to get the TARDIS for him, while he has a conversation with the opening Pandorica, which is not a great conversationalist. Rejected, he runs outside and stands on a big rock and gives the first and only truly marvelous version of the Big Bad-Ass Speech with which this season has been rife:

"Hello, Stonehenge! Who takes the Pandorica, takes the universe. But bad news, everyone. Because guess who? Ha! Listen, you lot, you're all whizzing about, it's really very distracting. Could you all just stay still a minute? Because *I am talking!* The question of the hour is, Who's got the Pandorica? Answer: I do. Next question, who's coming to take it from me? Come on! Look at me! No plan, no backup, no weapons worth a damn. Oh, and something else, I don't have anything to lose! So if you're sitting up there in your silly little spaceship, with all your silly little guns, and you've got any plans on taking the Pandorica tonight, just remember who's standing in your way. Remember every black day I ever stopped you. And then -- *and then* -- do the smart thing. Let somebody else try first."

Somehow not annoying, even with the flashing lights and magical music and mussed up gorgeous hair and Romans staring adoringly. I think it's because Matt Smith is amazing. He literally kept it from being obnoxious somehow and I cannot figure out how he did it. Point made, standing taller than ever, and knowing or believing that they'll fall to infighting for at least a bit longer, he struts off while the Romans stand around writing his name over and over on their *Custodis Irretitus*.

River can't get the TARDIS working, she's jerking all over the place and refuses to go anywhere. Down in the Underhenge, Amy's finally woken up -- the Doctor worries about Rory quite clearly at this point -- and he sends her out for fresh air. "Is it safe up there?" He giggles. "Not remotely, but it's fresh." On her way out she spots Rory, woozily remembering him as "The guy, yeah? The one who did the... Swordy thing?" And she thanks him, as his face gets sadder and sadder and more and more difficult to look at, and she keeps walking. "My men are up there. They'll look after you." It is brutal. The Doctor reminds him that he doesn't exist, which is like not the most comforting thing you can say, but does kinda cover the facts.

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While the TARDIS takes a very worried River off through the Vortex, the Doctor has some flashbacks to some various things and finally realizes what exploded, where the Cracks are coming from on the day of the wedding: The TARDIS, dead in the middle of a bright yellow sun, surrounded by stars, coming apart in his hands. Which still doesn't explain Rory, who was quite factually dead before he even got eaten by the Cracks. From his point of view, the Doctor asks again, here's what physically happened: He was in the cave, dying thanks to that old lizardy bitch, and then he woke up "a proper Roman, head full of Roman stuff." After a while, Leadworth and Amy and the Doctor just seemed like a dream, but then when he heard the other soldiers talking about the red-haired girl that was working with Fake Caesar and Exploding Cleopatra, it came back. *They* came back, he thought, for him.

"Oh, shut up. Go get her." (This is where the weekly groaning set in, but I'll try to spare you. The man sticks to his tropes, I'll give him that.) Rory's all existential about it, and why's he here, and she doesn't remember me, and the Doctor sort of radically recontextualizes everything into the typical nonsensical normalizing kitsch: Why's Rory here?

"Because you are. The universe is big. It's vast and complicated and ridiculous, and sometimes, very rarely, impossible things just happen, and we call them miracles, and that's the theory. 900

years, never seen one yet. But this would do me. Now get upstairs, she's Amy and she's surrounded by Romans. I'm not sure history can take it."

Sure, fine. The Doctor believes in miracles and loooooove. Who cares about factual inquiry when you've got boys kissing girls and having no personalities between them. Here's an engagement ring so you can propose marriage to a woman who has literally never met you... Before she blows one of those soldiers. Hurry!

The TARDIS chills out long enough for River to step outside, and while she's gone that voice comes back -- *Silence will fall* -- and the console screen Cracks, and we realize we're at Amy's house in Leadworth, the night before the wedding. River notes burn patterns on the grass outside, and the door is off its hinges, and it's verrrry creepy. Upstairs, in Amy's room, she's moderately appalled by the intense fetishistic collections of dolls and dioramas and stories and fantasies and whatnot -- "Oh, Doctor, why do I let you out?" -- and then she notices other things in the pile: *The Story Of Roman Britain*, a storybook version of the myth of Pandora.

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It's scary, scarier for River because she's figured it out and maybe we haven't yet, but Stonehenge is a real place and this time is a real time, so maybe Amy's like a memory magnet pulling these things into alignment, except then you've got the Pandorica, of which the Doctor has remained steadfast about the existence until today, and who knows what else. So then is Amy creating these things out of thin air? Are we in the Matrix? Whatever it is, River is right to be scared.

Rory comes out to see if Amy's okay, and gets all territorial about the fact that one of the Romans gave her a blanket, and she is put off by the weirdness, but something about him -- something sad, weary --- makes her ask his name, about which she laughs: "It's just not what you expect Romans to be called. What's it short for, Roranicus?"

She doesn't know it but she's crying.

River calls the Doctor and -- don't ever do this, it's terrifying when you do this -- tells him not to raise his voice or look alarmed: *Just listen*. And the music -- and maybe that parallel act earlier, with the horseback riding -- lets you know these two things, River and the Doctor inside, Amy and Rory inside, are about to become one thing. And it's shivery, and it's sad, and it's scary, and it's plotted out so well that your growing sense of dread outpaces the growing sense of dread for everybody else, even scared-to-death River and worked-to-death Doctor, because you can see it lining up, and the ways it could be variously bad or sad or both or terrifyingly both.

Amy is crying, but not because she's sad: It's because, for reasons she doesn't understand, she is happy. This is scary for her, scarier for us, but not scary at all for Rory. It's terribly sad, for Rory, but he doesn't know it yet; as much as I'm unsure about Rory's heroicism when all is said and done, I must say that this is the worst thing to happen to anybody in this entire season. It's almost too gruesome to think about, if you think about it.

Because meanwhile, as Amy is stretching herself out into these unknown, time-breaking places where she's happy because she doesn't know why, because she has accomplished the Doctor's miracle, this is what River is saying: "They're all right here in the storybook: Those actual Romans, the ones I sent you, the ones you're with right now. They're all in a book, in Amy's house, a children's picture book."

Because something -- not Amy's specialness, not the magic of the TARDIS, not anything like a miracle -- is using Amy, cruelly, all the pieces of her childhood, all the dearest things of her -- her favorite things, the things she loves most, the things she loves so fiercely she still loves them when they've vanished -- in order to create this trap. The Romans, the Pandorica. So perfectly well that even the lipstick worked on them. So perfectly well they don't even know that they're fake. So perfectly well that a joy rises up in her that is so fierce and full of love it scares her.

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"They might think they're real. The perfect disguise. They actually believe their own cover story, right until they're activated."

And Amy is weeping, with a joy she can't name.

As the TARDIS acts up, crazy and frightening, jerking River away from them once again, a fancy dress photo of Rory the Centurion, once upon a time in her hands, and Rory begs Amy to remember him, to love him again -- to marry him -- the trap closes around them all. The TARDIS is under something else's control, here at the site of the explosion, with River inside and the Doctor begging her to break free, or put the TARDIS to sleep, or run out the doors altogether, and the voice of Silence taunting her, and Rory begging her to remember as River fights to get control of the TARDIS again: Somebody else is flying it. Somebody else is in control.

The Romans drop like puppets with cut strings, and rise again. The Doctor can't see them: He's yelling at River to get the TARDIS somewhere safe, before she explodes and makes the Cracks. The Romans open at the wrist, Nestene guns at the ready, as the Pandorica opens. Rory's screaming, up above, begging to stay himself. Begging to be Rory.

"Amy! Listen to me, you have to run. You have to get as far away from here as you can! I'm a thing, I'll kill you! Just go!" He begs, doubled over, as she finally remembers him. Tears running down her face, she puts her arms around him: "Rory Williams from Leadworth. My boyfriend. How could I ever forget you? You are Rory Williams, and you aren't going anywhere ever again."

River is cruel to the TARDIS, looping chains around the doors to jerk them open, and to free them. The Pandorica opens. The Daleks appear, laughing at him. All the old enemies amassed, smiling at the Doctor as the trap closes: The Pandorica is empty, set for the greatest trickster of all time.

Amy begs Rory to stay with her, to stay sane, to be loved and remembered. She asks him about the ring and he produces it. "There it is. You remember. This is you. And you are staying." The miracle is broken, and he shoots her.

River cracks the TARDIS doors, sparks raining down, as Amy dies in Rory's arms. The enemies carry the Doctor to his cell, a chair inside the Pandorica; they gather round as he's locked in, gloating and smiling at each other. They explain, while Amy dies: The Cracks threaten them all. The Cracks come from the Doctor. They don't need his help, they need to save themselves. To save the universe, from the Doctor. He shouts, trying to explain it's the *TARDIS* that explodes, that it's not necessarily him that creates the Cracks but quite possibly a woman driver -- *The Professor in the TARDIS doesn't know -- but they seal him in, and River opens the TARDIS doors: Onto a great brick wall.*

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*And the TARDIS exploded, and the suns went out, and the Cracks appeared, and ate through everything. The Doctor was in jail, and River also was exploded, unable to escape, only able to apologize to her beloved Doctor one last time, as the TARDIS came apart; unable to stop the explosion on Amy's wedding day, to the man who'd just killed her, tears of joy still drying on her face.*

<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/the-big-bang/>

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"Every sun will supernova at every moment in history," the Doctor screamed, as they locked him in his perfect cell. 1894 years later, Amelia Pond sat in her lonely house, with its spooky overgrown garden, and asked Santa to help her with the Crack in her wall. Her parents were gone but she didn't know it. The ducks in the pond were never there. The TARDIS came, and gave her something better than Santa, or a cop, or anybody you could ask for.

She painted stars in the sky, like Vincent once did, and it scared the grownups, because there's no such thing as stars anymore. There never were. The universe was dark, all the time, it always had been, and nobody but Amelia remembered different. They took her outside, to show her the black sky, and she kept her mouth shut. She didn't bite them, not that time.

"I just don't want her growing up and joining one of those Star Cults. I don't trust that Richard Dawkins," one of them said downstairs, and then a mysterious and jaunty figure tossed a museum flyer through the mailslot: An exhibition of the Pandorica, the strange thing they'd discovered under Stonehenge, with a red pen's flourish pointing at the façade: *Come along, Pond.*

So she did. She dragged Aunt Sharon through the whole National Museum, past all kinds of science and history, soda in her hand, yelling Scottishly until she found some old stone Daleks, and then again into the Pandorica room. Aunt Sharon left far behind, as she smiled up at it. A jaunty trickster snatched her soda right out of her hand, and before she could see him she found a note on the Pandorica, at a perfect Amelia-height: *Stick around, Pond.*

So she did. I guess eventually Aunt Sharon got bored looking for her, and the people all went home, even the security guards, and she was finally alone. Alone in a museum is right up there with alone in a shopping mall, for things I had to personally realize I was never going to get to do, unless zombies happened. She made her way past all kinds of spooky nighttime things, and to the Pandorica. And when she touched it, it opened wide. The light shone down on her like first contact, and fell upon the stone Daleks, and sitting chained inside was a beautiful girl.

"Okay, kid," Amy said to Amelia. "This is where it gets complicated."

1894 years previous, Rory sat under a black and starless sky, with Amy's body in his lap, telling her the story: "So, the universe ended. You missed that. In 102 AD. I suppose this means you and I never get born at all. Twice, in my case." He asked her to laugh, it's the kind of joke she would like, and when that didn't work he quoted at her: "The Doctor said the universe was huge and ridiculous, and sometimes there were miracles. I could do with a ridiculous miracle about now..."

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Right on time, the Doctor appeared, looking lovely in a fez and holding a mop. He babbled at Rory for a bit, you know, about how dead Amy was not the end of the world -- although it was the end of the universe -- and then blinked out again for a second, scaring Rory to pieces. (That black sky, I must say: Very disturbing.) The Doctor asked Rory to get him out of the Pandorica, which if you can do that crap why even bother to have a time travel story, but whatever: He handed Rory the sonic screwdriver and asked him to leave it in Amy's pocket, for later.

The Doctor was surprised, to say the least, when Rory freed him from the Pandorica. (I guess moments after he was put in there, considering the entire universe ended at the end of the last episode.) They got variously weird with each other about the sonic, since now they both have one -- sparks when they touched them, tip to tip -- and the Doctor remarked that it was nice to know he had a future-self to give Rory the sonic anyhow. He explained further: "History has collapsed. Whole races have been deleted from existence. These are just like after-images. Echoes, fossils in time. The footprints of the never-were. Total event collapse. The universe literally never happened." So then why were they all hanging around at Stonehenge, dressed like this? "Eye of the storm, that's all. We're just the last light to go out..."

Rory at this point sadly explained to the Doctor about killing Amy with a shot right to the gut by his robot gun-hands, and the Doctor was like, "Oh, Rory!" He explained what Rory was, what we'd already figured out: He was a "Nestene duplicate, a lump of plastic with delusions of humanity." Rory protested that he was no longer that sort of thing -- "I'm Rory now," he shouted -- but whatever. "That's software talking." The Doctor pissed Rory off a little bit at this point, talking about how he didn't really have the time to fix it because of the universe ending, and then things got pretty annoying with Rory punching him in the face and screaming about love and I guess turning into a Real Boy just like Churchill's robo-doctor from before. Or maybe he said "to blave," which is as everybody knows an archaic verb-form for "to bluff."

Anyway. The Doctor packs Amy into the Pandorica, popping a quick psychic message into her head about what to do when they dig her up and put her in the museum. Problem one: She is dead. Well, it turns out she's only mostly dead, and they're going to blave her into the future because the Pandorica doesn't let you die, among the many other things it's got going on. It'll scan Amelia when she touches it, and thusly restore her adult self using her baby DNA. I think. In America we don't believe in that, not even for Superman.

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Problem two: The universe is over. Also, I guess, not a problem, because Amy Pond is the Moffat Lady Device of all time (*literally*) and because she grew up near to a Crack, she had it seems "the universe pouring through her dreams every night." (Cracks: Not just for multidimensional bleeds, prison containment services, time-sucking tendrils, TARDIS-bits repository, or appearing randomly once an episode anymore. Those damn Cracks are more timey-wimey than even the Weeping Angels when they need to be.) Apparently this made Amy so special that when the Nestene made the copies of the people, she gave them not only faces but also like hearts, and souls. The whole thing.

(Have you read *Ender's Game*? Quite good, although poisonous to a certain kind of Ayn Rand-leaning proto-asshole. The second book is pretty good too, but then the third book -- and you might be surprised to hear it -- wasn't sci-fi enough for me. In the first one you had like instant communication, that was about as speculative as it got besides the aliens. The second one, you get a person who lives entirely in the matrix, singularity-style, which I didn't mind because she was a cool person.

But by the third book you got people randomly jumping into hyperspace and trading souls around and it turns out that strong theory and quantum theory are all mixed up sort of queasily with this Chopra-ish animist theory where *everything is a soul* and then further toward a descriptivist magicalness whereby if you go to hyperspace while thinking about, say, a new bicycle, then when you come back bam: New bicycle.

Irritating, and not just because it's cloying and resulted in a lot of creepy asexual sex stuff, but also because it's like, do you really think before Lessa got *tired* none of the dragons had ever

learned to time-travel? Not one of the Dragonriders of Pern in thousands of years ever just really needed a nap? Do you know what I mean at all? Anyway, that's what is going on here. Amy has unconscious powers of memory so very strong that she can just hand out *aiuas* left and right. To the point of recreating the entire universe. Maybe that's the deal: She just didn't have room in there for a personality of any kind, besides what Karen G gives her. If that is the issue, and the reason she's such a blank slate of a person -- and not, in fact, because "generic girl" is the default setting for boys who write fairytales about girls -- I still don't much care for it.)

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Amy goes flopping down to the floor, having just been dead for 2000 years or so, and Amelia is weirded out by her, but not as much as she would be if she understood what Amy is saying, which is that it's weird to remember being somewhere in 1996 and also be in that place in 1996, with everything at different relative heights. Also, there's a card on the wall that directly reflects on the scene to come, where it traces the history of the Pandorica through all kinds of time periods and whatnot.

The Doctor straps on River's vortex manipulator -- "Rubbish way to time travel, but the universe is tiny now" -- so they can go meet Amy in 1996, where there are no stars and people don't seem to notice when their nieces go missing. Instead of getting onboard, Rory decides to throw down and make a whole big thing about how he wants to guard the box for 2000 years and he'll meet the Doctor on the other side. Which is sort of sweet, but I don't get why it's the huge deal they make of it. Even the Doctor wants to make out with him about it. But like, what? If anything happened to the box... Nothing is going to happen to the box. I don't even know how to finish that sentence.

But hey, if I understood the point of anything Rory ever says or does, this season would have been way less of a drag. So anyway, his plastic robot ass will be standing pointlessly outside that box for 2000 years, I guess because that's what a boy does when he loves a lady, honestly I think that's as deep as this goes, at which point the story can start again -- only it'll be *even more about Rory and less about Amy than it already was*.

According to "legend," now, the Pandorica was historically and always accompanied by a nameless Centurion, which nobody I guess found odd. "He appears as an iconic image in the artwork of many cultures, and there are several documented accounts of his appearances and his warnings to the many who attempted to open the box before its time." He yanked the Pandorica out of the Blitz with his own two hands, because robot boys are quite strong. Amy's upset by the video presentation's presumption that Rory must've died in the Blitz, because nobody ever heard about him again. (That *is* sad. God, I hope Rory's okay!) This story touches Amy on a very deep level, because -- if you are the lady involved -- that is a very awesome thing for a boy to do, regardless of its pointlessness.

So I guess I get it. Or maybe I'm just willing to buy anything and everything Karen G tries to sell us, because I adore her and I would love reasons to like Amy. But first, a bunch of running around, this time because of the stone Daleks in the museum suddenly jumping to life for some reason -- Amelia is like, "This is awesome!" -- and then the Doctor appears again, grabbing his Fez of Future Past and whisking both Ponds around and being generally dashing and sexy. Some sort of danger happens, and then Rory -- now a security guard with a cute haircut -- opens fire on the robot with his robot hands, resulting in the favorite Dalek thing: "Vision impaired!"

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Rory tries to apologize for killing the now very happy Amy all those years ago, but she just (of course) tells him to shut up and snogs him until the Doctor gets uncomfortable. Amelia -- thirsty from having her soda stolen earlier that day and then a long afternoon of hiding in dusty museum exhibits and then being chased around by a psychopathic garbage can -- asks for a drink, and the Doctor's like "It's all mouths today, isn't it?" which creeped me out somehow, and then they discuss how the light from the Pandorica falling across that Dalek is what woke it up.

Which I thought was the implication, but I still don't get it. I guess if it's all miracles and wizards and fairytales and the light from the Crack and the light from the Pandorica and blithely not to say cockily jumping into pretty serious/obvious paradoxes and plothes and whatever, it doesn't benefit anybody to wonder about this stuff. (And here I'd been given to understand that the whole point of watching this show was to worry about just this stuff and discuss it endlessly on the internet and get really mad and say mean things and construct elaborate proofs about made-up stuff. Figures the one time I actually have concerns about magical story logic, they are invalid. Other hand, the way the Doctor says "Pandorica" makes my knees melt, so let's stick with the good.)

The Dalek comes back to life so there's more running, at some point during which Rory points out that, between the fez and the mop, the Doctor now looks exactly like he did the first time he created this time loop and gave him the sonic, so the Doctor hops back to give Rory the sonic so he can free the Doctor to come give him the sonic... (Is it because of the collapsing universe that this is okay? They're all just playing in the starless margins anyway, so it's like scribbling on the back of a fax: Nobody would know anyway because it doesn't count. You could write horrible curse words, or the exact opposite of what it says on the front of the fax, and nobody would ever know. Is that it? That sort of makes me like this story more, if it's true.)

Cleverness, jumping about, Amelia wondering if the Doctor is just straight up magic or what, and then they set off running up the stairs, and then the Doctor remembers to hop back and tell Rory to put it in Amy's jacket, where it now is. (Some of these serve no purpose but cleverness, which makes them not so clever.) So then the Doctor hops all about, slipping the brochure through Aunt Sharon's door and dropping off the soda -- still cold, ha -- and telling them about the vortex manipulator and how it's awesome, and just when you're still clapping your hands and going *more more* the Doctor himself appears in front of the Doctor and, um, dies.

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He hugs himself from the floor, prone, and whispers something specific to himself, and then dies. The Doctor seems not so worried though -- "I've got twelve minutes, that's good... You can do loads in twelve minutes. Suck a mint, buy a sledge, have a fast bath!" -- and then flourishes himself back up the stairs, calling after Rory and Amy... But not Amelia, who has been Cracked. So what about Amy? All three of them, now, are anomalies apparently, "hanging on at the eye of the storm," which is just thrilling! Nothing exists, so nothing they do matters, so they're free to save the universe. It's like if the words on the back of the fax somehow got to the person anyway, and changed everything. That is very awesome. While Amy grits her teeth and gets very angry about the thought of the Doctor dying (specifically, note, that "He'll find a way"), Rory very sweetly and reverently covers the dead Doctor up.

Upstairs on the roof, it's morning, which is funny, is it not, since there are no stars, and mornings imply suns, which are another words for stars. (Also, downstairs that goddamn Dalek is still running around and talking all chopped and screwed.) The sun is less like a sun and more like a TARDIS exploding at the end of the universe, keeping everybody warm. Even in her death.

Rory snottily explains that he can also, thanks to being made of plastic, detect a voice in the familiar VWORP VWORP sound of the sun, and the Doctor cranks it for Amy: "I'm sorry, my love. I'm sorry, my love. I'm sorry, my love." River, caught in the center of the explosion: The TARDIS's emergency protocols have sealed off the control room, putting her into a time loop at the heart of the explosion. We jump to the sun, where the TARDIS doors finally open again and again and again, on nothing, and every time she dies, and every time she apologizes to her beloved Doctor...

Until the time that he's standing at the doors, still closed, as she rushes toward them. "Hi honey, I'm home."

It's debonair and sexy and sort of magnificently cocky, this: Like he's finally speaking River's language back to herself. They bounce back down to the Museum rooftop, where there's a quick blue joke about Robot Rory ("I dated a Nestene duplicate once. Swappable head. It did keep things fresh") and another quick joke about his fez, which he has decided like bowties before them are "cool." Bizarrely, he looks incredible in a fez. Maybe he can just do things like this. Amy, chuckling and cute, snatches it off his head just in time for River to take aim and squareness it into oblivion. Normally this sort of thing would get on my nerves (Women: Can't live with 'em, can't save the universe they destroyed without 'em, bitches'll shoot your hat, when they're not telling you to shut up) but there's a relaxedness in all four of them, the actors themselves maybe, that makes it feel like, I don't know. Like we've all been invited to this wonderful, silly party.

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Dalek. Again. For the fourth time in ten minutes. Although given the fact that the universe has ended, who else are they going to fight? Just the museum-grade Dalek that got woken up by the Pandorica. So there's shooting and running and four and a half minutes until it kills the Doctor, which he has, of course, on excellent authority. Meantime, here's a good question: Why is that Dalek here at all, to be woken up by the light-slash-"restoration field" of the Pandorica, when Daleks never existed and the whole universe is slightly larger than earth's starless sky?

"When the TARDIS blew up, it caused a total event collapse. A time explosion. It blasted every atom in every moment of the universe... Except inside the Pandorica." Okay, I was going to say something, but I have completely lost track of what they are talking about. "Inside it, perfectly preserved: A few billion atoms of the universe as it was. In theory, you could extrapolate the whole universe from a single one of them, like cloning a body from a single cell... The box contains a memory of the universe, and the light transmits the memory."

So there's that? But anyhow, if it couldn't even get one shitty Dalek right, how is it supposed to relight the fire and reboot the universe? By supplying it with infinite power, A, and B by transmitting its light to "every particle of space and time simultaneously." And *now* you are speaking my language, because there are a million ways to deal with the TARDIS and this one -- where it exists everywhere and nowhere and connects us to the infinite -- is the only way I know to deal with the TARDIS. And there is something unnerving and violent about doing that to her, but also I think very respectful. So even as the Dalek is fucking with them for the fourth time and the Doctor's down and they're all running around and getting separated, I couldn't stop thinking about that.

Not even when the Doctor vortex-manipulates his dying self back to that scene and River tells the others to leave her with his body and the approaching Dalek, and does some freaky shit to it, *viz* making the point that as an associate of the Doctor "mercy" should be her calling card but it's not if you really know her, then making it beg for mercy approximately fifty times, and then

shooting it right through the plunger with a cold sort of horrible light in her eyes, standing over her husband's young and beautiful corpse.

I mean, keep her dangerous and willing to do things the Doctor's not going to do, and for sure make the point that not only is she still feeling weird about ending the universe and failing the Doctor but also feeling weird about the fact that this guy is about to kill the Doctor, whom she loves: All of this is true and very necessary and earns the point. But I can't stop thinking about Ambrose and how soundly she was demonized, and how not even on a good day is it okay to make something beg for mercy when you have no intention of showing it any. Not even on the back of the reality fax is that okay. So to then apply this Ambrose nastiness, this women-have-no-ethics thing that is a classic and eternal facet of male psychological development, to the original wild card mother-wife-daughter-lover-bride-*femme fatale* character, who just fucked up and killed *the entire universe* because she shouldn't be driving *his car* in the first place... It's going a very long way to say a very short thing, I think.

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Rory and Amy run to find the Doctor's body from twelve minutes ago, but it's gone. River assures them that he's not really dead -- "Rule one: The Doctor lies" -- and that the Dalek is dealt with. (Still shivery.) So then they run back to the Pandorica, where the nearly dead Doctor has locked himself once again into the Pandorica, turning the whole rooftop situation into another clever time-loopish moment where everybody else (including himself) was running around with Dalek and the fez and all that, so he could come down here and set things up for whatever's going to happen next.

That's when the room starts fading. First the objects, and the world outside; soon, everything. The Doctor's still too fucked up (looking *fine*, though) to really carry on a conversation, so he just sort of slumps in the Pandorica and mumbles about Big Bang 2.0, which is when they restart the universal engine using the old TARDIS and then Amy brainwaves everything back into existence (I think). "The TARDIS is still burning. It's exploding at every point in history. If you threw the Pandorica into the explosion, right into the heart of the fire, then... *Let there be light*. The light from the Pandorica would explode everywhere at once." Ah, the restoration field, right; we haven't gotten to the Amy part yet. So he's going to use the manipulator to pilot the Pandorica into the heart of the exploding TARDIS, which will then power the Pandorica sort of scribbling over all of space and time and fixing everything.

They stand in a bright red light, outside the Pandorica, as the world dies around them. Amy bitches at Rory for a second, and he just hugs her, because this is all quite sad. So but then what, as far as everybody in the room currently? They all wake up where they ought to be? None of this ever happens, and they don't remember it? Surely the Doctor can't possibly survive, Amy shrieks, and River sadly confirms it: "All the cracks in time will close, but he'll be on the wrong side. Trapped in the neverspace, the void between the worlds. All memory of him will be purged from the universe. He will never have been born." That sounds just terrible! I am sure that won't happen. River is very sad, bringing Amy into the Pandorica to say goodbye; she doesn't have much to say to him: "He doesn't really know me yet. Now he never will."

That is, to me, a lot more moving than anything that goes down with Rory, although there are a lot of times -- like right now -- that watching Amy be sad is nearly too much to take. She heads inside, crying and afraid to even look at him, and he smiles up at her. "Amy Pond. The Girl Who Waited. All night in your garden. Was it worth it?" Of course it was, she spits, afraid she'll start crying. "You asked me why I was taking you with me and I said... No reason? I was lying." He explains he's not being weird or maudlin: There are reasons, and there are reasons. "Amy, your house was too big. That big, empty house. And just you, and Aunt Sharon. Where were your

mum and dad? Where was... Everybody who lived in that big house?" She can't remember. Her parents never were. Her loneliness always was.

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"There was a crack in time in the wall of your bedroom. And it's been eating away at your life, for a long time now. Amy Pond, all alone. The girl who didn't make sense. How could I resist?" She's horrified, but taking it pretty well as she thinks her way through it. "Nothing is ever forgotten, not really," he says, "But you have to try." He smiles at her, beautiful, and she puts the sonic in his pocket as he gets ready to live. He promises her that she is special: Remember her family, just like she did Rory, and they'll be back. And he? "You'll have your family back. You won't need your imaginary friend anymore."

The doors start to close, and she weeps from the other side of them. He groans with laughter: "Amy Pond... Crying over me, eh? Guess what?"

"*Gotcha.*"

Watching the Pandorica explode into the sky, toward the sun that's never been so close, River gets a text: "Geronimo."

And then he is there, and he is dying, and the Pandorica and the TARDIS are, for a moment, one complex and wonderful and heartbreaking thing: Stasis and change, exile and freedom. The cage and the freedom from the cage and the secret joys inside the cage. Once there was a little boy who ran away from home, and when they asked him if he missed it, he'd smile and say, "So much." Once there was a little girl, who ran away, and when they told her to grow up she asked them why. Silence made the TARDIS a jail cell for River, on the day there was no universe, and the Doctor turned the jail cell into life: Ultimate stasis, stasis so bright it keeps the universe alive, burning brighter than sunflowers. And on the back of the fax, he wrote a new story: That all the oldest foes, in their hate and strength and ingenuity, built a box with hope inside. It was their arms around him.

The Doctor wakes up on the TARDIS floor, missing his fez, joyful as usual at his daring escape. He hears himself and Amy coming, talking about automatic sand and Space Florida, and then before he can react -- good old hatrack standing up behind him -- he realizes he's rewinding, his personal timestream unraveling itself around him. "Hello, universe. Goodbye, Doctor." He says her name, once, and she turns around, but before he knows it, he is gone.

Three weeks ago, placing the advert for Craig's apartment; a Crack opens before he can tell her anything. Further back, to the *Byzantium*, he holds her hands with her eyes closed against the stone, the angel inside her: "Remember what I told you when you were seven," he says, tears rising in his throat, his head against her temple. "You have to remember," he says, and kisses her goodbye.

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Amelia's house, the night she waited, at the eleventh hour. She fell asleep on her tiny little suitcase, waiting for him, and he never did come. He carries her inside, sits at her bedside, desperate. Just another voice, through the Cracks. "I thought if you could hear me, I could hang on somehow. Silly me. Silly old Doctor." He smiles down at her, sleeping so softly. "When you wake up, you'll have a mum and dad... And you won't even remember me. Well, you'll remember me a little. I'll be a story in your head. But that's okay. We're all stories in the end. Just make it a good one, eh?"

He talks to her in her sleep, getting weaker and older by the second, patting her hand, trying not to cry. Trying not to be afraid.

"Because it was, you know. It was the best! A daft old man who stole a magic box and ran away. Did I ever tell you that I stole it? Well, I *borrowed* it. I was always going to take it back. Oh, that box, Amy. You'll dream about that box. It'll never leave you. Big and little at the same time. Brand *new* and *ancient*. And the bluest *blue* ever."

He's a wizard, it's a spell. A spell she'll spend her life unraveling, calling him back across the void. Giving him life, for the one he's helped her build.

"And the times we had, eh? Would have had. Never had. In your dreams, they'll still be there. The Doctor and Amy Pond. And the days that never came."

The Cracks are closing, faster and faster. Her home is healed before his eyes. He shivers.

"But they can't close properly until I'm on the other side. I don't belong here anymore."

It's too sad. Too much, all that life. He kisses her goodbye, too strong and too weak for the rest of the world's rewinding. "Bye bye, Pond," he says. And steps into the Crack.

She wakes up and looks around, but there's nothing. It's a very starry night. And by morning time, it's 2010 and the sun is bright. Amy's mother wakes her up: It's her wedding day. She throws herself upon her mother, back from nowhere, but it fades as quickly as a dream. They joke about her father's cooking, the Ponds and how they laugh. She hurtles downstairs to see him, collar points up waiting for his necktie, and she throws herself on him too, laughing. Joyful and confused. "You're my tiny little dad!"

Rory's brushing his teeth when Amy calls him. "Do you feel like there's a great big thing in your head, and you feel like you should remember it, but you can't?" He says he can, but admits he's only agreeing because he's scared of him. It doesn't sound nasty at all, when they say these things now. They love each other. She hangs up and bounces across the room, to her wedding gown.

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At the reception, there are speeches and laughter; River Song walks past and before they know it, Amy's crying again. Sad, for reasons she can't name.

There's an empty book, a blank TARDIS journal, left for Amy by a mysterious woman. Another wizard, now that she's a woman. The pages are empty but the cover is blue. The bluest blue ever. Amy's crying, and she doesn't know why. One of the men has a bowtie; one has braces. She remembers, all the fun they had and didn't have. The Raggedy Doctor. Mom rolls her eyes, Rory's just plain worried. She stands up, shushing her dad and addressing them all; addressing the sky: "I remember you! I remember! I brought the others back, I can bring you home too. Raggedy man, I remember you, and you are *late for my wedding!*"

The room begins to shake; the cake may topple. The wind comes up, in the fellowship hall, and she stands, not running, in the center of it all.

"Something old. Something new. Something borrowed. Something blue."

It's a spell. She calls him back to her. Knocking at the door, calling him out, calling him out: "Okay, Doctor. Did I surprise you this time?"

"Completely astonished," he says, which his tux belies. (Rory: "It's the Doctor! How did we forget the Doctor? I was plastic, he was the stripper at my stag. Long story...") She tries to kiss him and he jumps away, ceding her hand to "the brand new Mr. Pond." Rory protests, but soon gives in: Mr. Pond indeed. (And no longer plastic, I guess because of Amy or something.) The Doctor moves the TARDIS off the dancefloor, and in a little while they are dancing. He stands in the corner, looking if possible even more beautiful than usual, thinking about Rory, the Boy Who Waited. Rory would blush, if he could hear him, but he's otherwise engaged, dancing with his beautiful bride.

Everything is so awesome! I remember really hating this the first time I saw it -- not one particular moment, just the whole thing in general. But man! And I think part of it is that from this particular angle in the post-drama glow it suddenly -- just like the Pandorica and the TARDIS, dancing together in the spark of new life -- is less about growing up and boys + girls and what makes a girl a woman, like they've been explicitly telling us all season, and starts being about something altogether bigger: A comedy, in the mythic sense. In Shakespeare a wedding just means the story was a happy one, and has completed. That the opposites are united and that we're grownups not for having acceded to the brainwashing but because we have been transformed. A marriage in the true sense, the alchemical, the chymic, the way if you took an irresistible force and an immovable object and put them together they'd look astonishingly like the TARDIS and the Pandorica, embracing in the heat of the starless sky. Here I count at least four:

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Outside, ready to go, fairytale completed, he tries to keep a little bounce in his step. River appears, grinning at him: "Did you dance? Well, you always dance at weddings, don't you?" There's something in him, all grown up like Amy, in a way, as he turns to meet his wife. "You tell me," he says, fully operating on her level for the first time. (Maybe this is when she falls in love: Transformed, finally; finally ready for the next thing. Or maybe the tux is throwing me off.)

"The writing's all back," he says, handing the diary over, "But I didn't peek." She thanks him; she means it. And when he gives her the vortex manipulator: "Are you married, River?" She is. She giggles at him. "No, hang on. Did you think I was asking you to marry me, or asking if you were married?" Yes. "No, but was that yes, or yes?" Yes, she says, as full of love and sadness as anything. Passionate, afraid, content, in love.

"River," he asks, leveling a look of just undeniable hotness at her: "Who are you?" He'll find out, soon enough. "And I'm sorry, but that's when everything changes." He grins, he heads inside, dancing across the TARDIS floor, toward the next adventure. Amy's sorted, Rory's sorted, River just got interesting and he restarted the universe. Not a bad day.

But before he can take off, the Ponds come roaring in. He apologizes, as though he's not skipping out on them, and they laugh at him. He points out that they still don't know what blew the TARDIS up, or why, on their wedding date. "And why now? The Silence, whatever it is, is still out there, and I have to..." He finally answers the ringing phone: "No, but that's not possible. She was sealed into the Seventh Obelisk. I was at the prayer meeting. Well, no, I get that it's important. An Egyptian goddess loose on the Orient Express. In space! Give us a mo."

He tells them goodbye, and they grin first at each other and then at him: "Goodbye," they say, to that old world, and shut the doors behind them. Neither is it a cage nor are they running away: This is the next thing.



<http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/doctor-who/a-christmas-carol-1/>

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More distracting lens flare than you can shake an *Enterprise* at, and the stormgate is critical as a pleasure barge crew runs around shouting on the bridge: They're heading into a very intense atmosphere and there's no response from the surface. Amy and her husband what's his face, Rory, come running out having summoned the Doctor to save them, and of course they are wearing policewoman and Centurion outfits, because of course people in their twenties are so bad at sex that they require kinky outfits. (On the other hand, if you ever wondered whether the policewoman outfit was exactly what it seemed to be, now you know. Both inside and outside the show.) Very dangerous, lots of science fiction yelling and more lens flare, and they're heading into orbit, and then there's the TARDIS, coming up alongside: It's Christmas.

Down on the planet a sour Mr. Sardick is giving a speech about Christmas, like so: "On every world, wherever people are, in the deepest part of the winter, at the exact midpoint... Everybody stops and turns and hugs. As if to say *Well done. Well done, everyone. We're halfway out of the dark.* Back on Earth, we called this Christmas. Or the Winter Solstice. On this world, the first settlers called it the Crystal Feast."

Hugs. Isn't that just jolly? But here on the planet of the fish-fog, Sardick calls it expecting something for nothing. He is not one for "hugs," no sir. He is one for meanness and yelling at poor people. I certainly hope somebody comes along and teaches him the meaning of Christmas by showing him his past, present and future. That would be original.

The Cratchits in question are there to see a beautiful lady who is apparently frozen in a coffin with only her face exposed. They'd like him to let her out so she can enjoy Christmas -- her favorite holiday -- but since nobody has reprogrammed his brain yet, he doesn't care a whole lot. In fact, he jokes about it incessantly. Sometimes he'll make a pun that's not that funny and then turn to his employees and say, "That was funny," and they'll laugh. He's a very unique character. So the situation is that on this planet, where he lives now even though he once apparently lived on Earth -- not that we'll ever get back to that -- he is in charge of things like the sky and the fog-fish and also loaning people money. In return, he takes their loved ones and puts them in frozen caskets for a while. Doesn't that sound likely?

Turns out this family has had this young lady in cold storage for a good long while, in fact: Her sister is now more the age of her mother. I don't know about you, but if my family left me in there that long I would have something to say about it. That's because I have a personality, though, so no worries here. One of the employees keeps trying to tell Scrooge that there's a spaceship about to crash into the planet, but he doesn't really care. He thinks it will be funny if they die. And he hasn't even *met* Rory yet!

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Just when all of these dumb things are happening, whom should come rocketing down the chimney but the sexy restorative balm we call the Doctor, flopping around with his hair and all. He thought it would be fun to enter the scene Santa Claus-style, and then babble at them for awhile in some sub-par *Buffy* ergot about the "chimney-ness" and the "bored now" and whatever else Stephen Moffatt probably thinks is clever. There's a great deal of talk to the poor people about Father Christmas and Frank Sinatra's hunting lodge and Albert Einstein, with whom apparently the Doctor and Marilyn Monroe had a threesome. In the future of the past, which has

not yet happened. Or else the threesome was with Father Christmas and Albert Einstein, which makes more sense and is easily four times as annoying to think about.

The Doctor starts in messing about with Scrooge's console, having not stopped talking and showing no signs of slowing down, and figures out that it "controls the sky," which as you rightfully point out means nothing. Technically, what it controls is the clouds, which technically are made of tiny particles of ice, which contain fish and also sharks. At which point, I think, we've officially hit the record number of random pointless things shoved into a given episode that was first established with the abominable "Beast Below." Difference being this episode is fairly great, and of course also taking into account that Christmas episodes generally have sucked. But then, much less far to fall these days, I suppose.

Scrooge assures the Doctor that the lady on ice is nobody important and the Doctor cocks an eyebrow. "Blimey, that's amazing. Do you know, in 900 years of time and space, I've never met anyone who wasn't important before." Somehow, thanks to Matt Smith, it comes off as generally appealing and not a condescending load. He fiddles with the control for a bit before Scrooge explains that it's isomorphic and will only respond to he himself: "The skies of this entire world are mine. My family tamed them, and now I own them."

Cue the Doctor to be insufferable again -- "Tamed the sky? What does that mean?" -- and they talk about how Scrooge is very, very important and the Doctor doesn't know who he is, and then before you know it he's threatened Scrooge's very life if they don't save Amy from her sex boat. Finally the Doctor leaves, and Scrooge tosses the Cratchits out as well, with glorious aplomb: "And next time, try and find me some funny poor people!"

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But then, one thrown piece of something later, he raises his hand to hit Tiny Tim and the Doctor gets all manner of stern about that, but then he doesn't hit Tiny Tim, and this is a sign that Scrooge is not all bad, so a tiny rainbow of stars flies across the screen, because we've all learned something: Hitting people is bad! We hate people who hit children! We're good people, the good folks who don't care for child-hitters. Soak up your feelings about that, it really sets you apart. From all those people out there who condone child abuse.

There's two kinds of cynicism: The kind that says the world is awful, which is lazy and a good way to care about nothing. And then there's the kind that sells you self-righteousness as an antidote. Neither of them are actually about doing anything about anything, but at least one of them feels good. In play here, I can't decide. I just know I'd rather not have to worry about it when I can watch the Doctor flapping his hands around, of which he does a jolly load in this episode, because whether or not we're being sold something I don't believe for a second that *he's* got any cynicism in him at all.

The Doctor figures out that Scrooge was himself a beaten child, but not by the obvious signs of him hitting a kid, no: By the arrangement of chairs around the room, all of which face away from the dour face of Scrooge Senior's portrait on the wall. Moffatt's like a person who's read a lot about human beings in the library, and certainly rereads his own scripts for inspiration on a regular basis, but never actually met a real example of either. I sure hope this episode ends with a bunch of sappy music and people hugging in a montage. That will be *super* Christmassy.

Anyway, apparently the Doctor heard that whole speech Scrooge gave about Christmas as he was coming down the chimney, even though the TARDIS showed up well after that, because he tells Scrooge it's okay to love Christmas and that he's not like his scary hitting sort of dad, because Scrooge himself is just like Christmas: Halfway out of the dark.

Well. Didn't hate that part.

Back to the USS Lensflare, where things are going to continual shit and yet it never ever crashes, and the Doctor discusses the situation as it stands: "I've tracked the machine that unlocks the cloud belt. I could use it to clear you a flight corridor and you could land easily. *But* I can't control the machine. *But* I've met a man who can. *And* he hates me." Amy, who's been delightful throughout the conversation, cocks a brow of her own: "Were you being *extracharming* and clever?" They're cute together sometimes.

Some poor person accosts the Doctor to thank him for yelling at Scrooge and wish him a Merry Xmas and also get inside because, quote, "The fog's thick tonight, and there's a fish warning." While a Christmas carol plays over the PA, the Doctor delights in the CGI fish for awhile, and then when Amy starts asking what the noise is all about, he screams "Christmas Carol!" about sixteen times before he hears himself and realizes he knows how to fix our Scrooge: "Can't use the TARDIS, because it can't lock on. So that ship needs to land, but it can't land unless a very bad man suddenly decides to turn nice, just in time for Christmas Day..."

Which, props for being honest. And of all the things I've grown to sigh about, with this show, I must admit that they've done a marvelous job here of rewriting that old thing to make it wonderful, rather than a hack job. And the Doctor, smiling. There's that too.

A video of Kazran Sardick, age twelve and a half, begins to play on the wall of Scrooge's drafty parlor, surprising and immediately mesmerizing him. Before the kid can even get into discussing his Top Secret Special Project, Scrooge Senior comes running in to hit him about the face and chin, something about the fish which everyone at school has seen but which daddy thinks are too dangerous, must be controlled, "Idiot's Lantern" redux, and the kid yells about how "the singing" lulls the fish and that there's no need to be afraid of them, and then more hitting. The whole time, our Scrooge loves the boy as much as he still fears the father; drawn further and further in.

I spent my whole Christmas break poring over photographs they'd saved, that I never knew about. From another life. I thought they were gone forever, and I went through them again and again and pulled out my favorites and brought them home. I'm still staring at them. And I realized at some point that this is the difference between vanity and narcissism: That my obsession with these pictures of my father, and my mother, these pictures of myself as a young kid, had nothing to do with vanity and everything to do with finding all the pieces of myself. The Doctor puts his hand on Scrooge's shoulder, so calmly and firmly, and swears that he's okay. It was just a movie. There were good parts too. It's over now.

The Doctor, in addition to setting up this little series of visitations, has also engineered it so that every one of Scrooge's servants has won the lottery, all at the same time, and have up and quit. He has also engineered the existence of the lottery, at that. On the video, the boy weeps and his father tells him to keep the windows shut tight. The Doctor and Scrooge watch it together, he can't take his eyes off the screen. He cried all night, desperate to see the fish. He learned life's most invaluable lesson: "Nobody comes."

And the Doctor dances away, and appears at the window behind the boy. The babysitter won the lottery, it seems, as well. He jumps on the bed and says hello to the camera, to the future: "Now, your past is going to change. That means your memories will too. Scary, but you'll get the hang of it." And as it begins to happen, it happens.

The Doctor swept round the room, talking about what was under the bed and in the cupboards: "Do you know, there's a thing called a face spider. It's just like a tiny baby's head with spider legs, and it's specifically evolved to scuttle up the backs of bedroom cupboards..." I think that's when I would have begun to trust him. He showed the boy the psychic paper: "I think you'll find I'm universally recognized as a mature and responsible adult?" But no, he'd broken it: Finally, a lie too big.

The Doctor and the boy discussed the fish, the fogs, taming the sky and like that. He promised to let the boy see the fish, and hung out his screwdriver while they hid in the cupboard, as a shiny bait. (No face spiders that time of night: "They'll all be sleeping in your mattress.") When the Doctor asked why the boy wanted to see the fish, he said it was because they were scary. A good answer, and the Doctor agreed, but it wasn't the real answer. During the last big fog the fish had broken through, a whole shoal of them. Nobody got hurt, but it was scary and everyone was there and they all saw, except for the boy. He didn't get to be a part of the story.

As the Doctor goes to check his bait, both Scrooges cry out. "Eyes on the tie. Look at me. I wear it and I don't care. Trust me?" They do. "That's why it's cool." That's what dorks always say, though. The Doctor head out into the dark room -- somehow Scrooge remembers this part even though it hasn't happened yet -- and before you know it he'd been attacked by a huge CGI flying shark. I won't lie, it looked awesome. Hanging there in the bedroom, swimming right at him. (If you're wondering why there was just this one shark and the rest of them fish, I can't tell you. Nor why it will still be around in fifty years, all alone.)

The Doctor dove back into the closet with his young friend, and they babbled at each other for a while as the shark attacked, having eaten a fairly large portion of the sonic screwdriver in the process. The shark crashed through the door, and old Scrooge loses video, and then both he and himself yelling about how the shark was going to eat them. Which: You're standing right there, it didn't eat you. The fun of writing about time travel is, one would think, actually writing about time travel. Whatever. So they escaped somehow, CGI anyway, and then the shark was lying out on the patio, unable to get home. And Scrooge wept for her, this stranded lady, and Scrooge weeps for her, this lonely hungry thing. "She was trying to eat you," the Doctor said tenderly, and they both knew that didn't matter at all.

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They ran for a coffin, the better to get her back into the sky -- the Doctor makes a quick detour back to now to get the door codes from old Scrooge -- heading down into the crypts. Scrooge went straight to the woman's coffin from fifty years hence, and the Doctor wondered subtly why she keeps cropping up in this story. "My name is Abigail Pettigrew, and I'm very grateful for Mr. Sardick's kindness... I could not have chosen this path were it not for the compassion and generosity of the great philanthropist and patron of the poor, Mr. Elliot Sardick, but I'm also surrounded by the fish, the beautiful, iridescent, magical fish..." She loves the fish, she spoke like that for quite a while, which is why Scrooge loved and loves her. The Doctor was again horrified by this whole human-collateral thing, and they agreed Scrooge Senior was a dick, and then the shark showed up again, down in the crypts.

There was the submarine beeps of the shark coming closer, the pieces of the screwdriver calling itself to itself, and then silence, and then Abigail, awake and singing the shark to sleep. Crouched in the mist, casket lying open, singing "In The Bleak Midwinter." The boys converged on her, staring, discussing quietly whether it was "the singing" or simply "notes resonat[ing] in the ice, causing a delta wave pattern in the fog," that calmed the shark and delights the fish. They kept biting the Doctor as he shouted science, and figured out how to save Amy in the

future, but Scrooge finally helped him realize it never mattered. Whether Abigail's singing or the resonation of ice crystals, it helped.

The boy, the woman and the Doctor stood in the door of the TARDIS, staring out at the fish as they danced. Scrooge took out his camera and snapped pictures of her, smiling in the ice and fog; Scrooge retrieves the pictures from an old desk and stares at them, one by one. The Doctor opened up the shark's coffin and released her, out into the sky, but when he asked Abigail about the countdown lock on her coffin -- Eight, it says, eight left -- she was pretty cagey. "It pertains to me, sir, not the fish. You are a doctor, you say?"

The Doctor wondered about that, but not enough to ask. They locked her back up, and returned in a year's time for their next Christmas visit. This time wearing Santa hats. He produced a carriage and summoned the shark, and they rode through the sky, laughing, while the city slept, and locked her back up again. Scrooge looks at them, photograph after photograph, smiling as the years pass: Once with matching bowties, the next with bowties and fezzes, once a great bloody long scarf, visiting all of time and space. Abigail at the pyramids, Abigail in the Alps. Every Christmas Eve they'd throw open her door and shout, "Merry Christmas!" And she'd smile and call out, "Doctor!"

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Until the day Kazran was big, nearly her age, grown into almost a man, blushing and retiring. Beautiful. That Christmas, Abigail asked for something special: To be a ghost of Christmas Present. Three left, that time; their fifth Christmas, the three of them. She stood outside her family's house, weeping in the snow, as the Doctor watched. He recognized her sister, from when she will be older and more heartbroken. Kazran came and she took his hand. For a moment, she caught him blushing. And then who should appear in the window but the Doctor, ushering them in from the cold.

Abigail told her family their secret -- how every Christmas Eve she was free, for the night -- while the Doctor tried and failed with magic tricks for the younger ones. The family was suspicious of Kazran, though she swore he wasn't like his father, that he would not be. The Doctor heard, but pretended not to listen, and prayed that she was right. They begged her to stay for Christmas Day, but she didn't have enough left. So the sister held Christmas that Eve. Her sister wasn't sure: Hadn't she seen him, around the town sometimes, without any friends? Not yet part of the story? Walled off by old Sardick, under a tamed sky? "He's got me," she said proudly, and under the table she took his hand. And when it was time to lock her up again, Abigail told Kazran goodnight.

Scrooge remembers 1952, a pool party at Sinatra's. Abigail stood by the pool and Kazran came running, in tux and bowtie, when she finally decided to tell him what it meant. How many Christmases she had left. He kissed her, desperately, and the Doctor came running: He'd just gotten accidentally engaged to Marilyn Monroe. They took her home, tears in his eyes, and she could barely take her hand from his as he put her to sleep for the last time. They didn't tell the Doctor; he watched her go to sleep, weeping, and when the Doctor ran to get him for the next one, he put on a fake smile and told the Doctor to leave it.

"Every Christmas Eve, it's getting a bit old. Christmas is for kids, isn't it? I've got some work with my dad now, I'm going to focus on that. Get that cloud belt under control." The Doctor was hurt, but more than that he could feel something wasn't right. Some part of the story he couldn't see, that was hurting them both. That he could feel, in Kazran, making him sad. He left him the half a sonic screwdriver, and though he begged Kazran for an explanation, it hurt too much to say aloud. So he left it.

By the next year Mr. Sardick had developed the sound waves to control the fish. "Look what I'm giving you. The sky, and everything beneath it. Only you and I can control this." Kazran made for his desk and removed the screwdriver, intent on calling the Doctor back to him, to save the skies from his father. But standing outside the window, the one he'd first come in, was the Doctor. Smiling proudly. Unaware that every gift he'd brought contained death and heartache. He wanted him when he couldn't see him, but that proud smile -- that damnable, happy, lively smile -- told him he'd never be part of the story. The Doctor promised but he couldn't deliver. Even when they come, nobody comes.

Scrooge answers the phone once again to the President, begging him to explain why he should care about the 4003 souls aboard Amy's ship: "As a very old friend of mine once took a very long time to explain: Life isn't fair."

You can crawl inside a person's heart but you'll never know what you're doing. A life takes as long to know as it does to live. If the Doctor had investigated the countdown lock, had followed up on all the clues as her life ticked away, perhaps it would have changed things. But the whole thing was a gamble anyway; people are a black box with an obscure mechanism inside for most of us, but especially the Doctor. He could never understand what broke in Kazran's heart, the day he decided he'd rather be bored than heartbroken. Too alien, too new. He wouldn't possibly understand what happened the next Christmas, when Kazran came to the window and saw him smiling in. How it must have burnt, that smile.

Amy appears, in holographic form, and briefly is joined by Rory -- still both wearing their fetish outfits -- to show him Christmas Present. They bring him the 4003 souls aboard their ship, singing "Silent Night," so that he can look into their eyes. Amy reappears, looking everywhere for Abigail's casket. "He was trying to turn you into a nicer person," she explains. "And he was trying to do it *nicely*," she fairly spits. "Time can be rewritten." He swears that it can't, and strides through the souls to Abigail's coffin.

"I would never have known her if the Doctor hadn't changed the course of my whole life to suit himself." She asks why he doesn't let her out. "This is what the Doctor did to me. Abigail was ill when she went into the ice. On the point of death. I suppose the rest in the ice helped her, but she's used up her time. All those Christmas Eves with me. I could release her any time I want... And she would live a single day. So tell me, Ghost of Christmas Present, how do I choose which day?"

He's not the man the Doctor wanted. He's not the man he would have been. Amy weeps for him. "I'm sorry. I really am. I'm very, very sorry. But you know what? She's got more time left than I have. More than anyone on this ship." She takes him onto the ship, the lensflares, in holographic form; Rory transmits the chorus's voices out into the clouds, trying to stabilize the ship, but it's not working. So why are they still singing, then? Why still a silent night? "We haven't told them," ship's captain explains. "I understand you have a machine that controls this cloud layer. If you can release us from it, we still have time to make a landing. Nobody has to die." But everybody has to die, he says, and tonight's as good as any other. "How do you choose?" he asks. She can't answer.

The Doctor met him, back in the crypt, and apologized for it. For taking his heart. For boxing it up in photographs and ice. His eyes were sad, and angry, and full of love. And this is what the old man said: "All my life, I've been called heartless. My other life, my real life, the one you



rewrote. Now look at me." But the Doctor wasn't finished with him yet. He still needed to see the future. The old man raged. "Show me! I'll die cold, alone and afraid. Of course I will, we all do! What difference does showing me make? Do you know why I'm going to let those people die? It's not a plan. I don't get anything from it. It's just that I don't care. I'm not like you. I don't even want to be like you! I don't and never, ever will care!" That's why it's cool.

The Doctor didn't believe the old man. Neither did Scrooge. He stood before him, old and alone and lying through his wretched teeth, in the cold, outside Abigail's coffin, and couldn't believe that he'd ever stopped loving. The fish, the sky, the beautiful woman. All these things that meant so much to him, he said he'd one day hate. "Is this who you want to become, Kazran?" The Doctor looked past the old man's shoulder at him, and the old man turned around and when he saw him, he began to weep. They were drawn together, in love and a little bit of fear; he raised his hand to strike and the boy called him "Dad." For a moment, that was what he'd looked like. But only for a moment.

Behind the old man's eyes a dam of love broke, remembering Abigail. Remembering Kazran. Half wounded, half in shadow. Gathering the pieces of himself, holding them tight. Begging to be whole.

They rush to the isomorphic thing, now that Scrooge cares again, but he's changed too much. The Doctor's done too much damage, too much healing. He produces his half of the screwdriver but the Doctor can't think of anything for a moment. Until he does: The other half, lodged in a shark high up in the clouds. Resonant. Young Scrooge and Old stay close together as the Doctor works; they stare at each other in blossoming horror and understanding as the Doctor explains their last hope: She will have to sing: "It calmed the shark. It will calm the sky, too." One half battered; one half old and barely living at all. Reaching out across the skies, the years, to heal itself.

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It was always Christmas Eve, for Abigail and Kazran: Never Christmas. It hasn't snowed in fifty years. But her voice unlocks the clouds, standing in the streets, and the people rush out into the lanes to see it. Like the day he missed the fish, for the world over. The Doctor takes him home; he stands out in the snow with his beloved as she teases him for saving her days, like a miser.

And this is what she sings: "When you're alone/ Silence is all you see/ When you're alone/ Silence is all you'll be/ When you are here/ Music is all around/ When you are near/ Music is all around/ Open your eyes/ Don't make a sound..."

I won't remark on the Silence there, but I like this next bit: "Let in the shadow/ Let in the light/ Of your bright shadow." The things he was afraid of -- love, the Doctor, pain, loss -- chased him like a shark into a corner. The things you leave out are the things that fuck you up. He made himself half of a man because the alternative was too hard. Easier to pretend people are cattle than to admit them. Not the newest story, but one of the best.

His life changed forever, when he took that boy in his arms; but his life *began* when she sang down the snow. She was his bright shadow, and he let her in. It was their last night together, and it was their first Christmas.

Halfway out of the dark.

